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MARK MASON'S VICTORY

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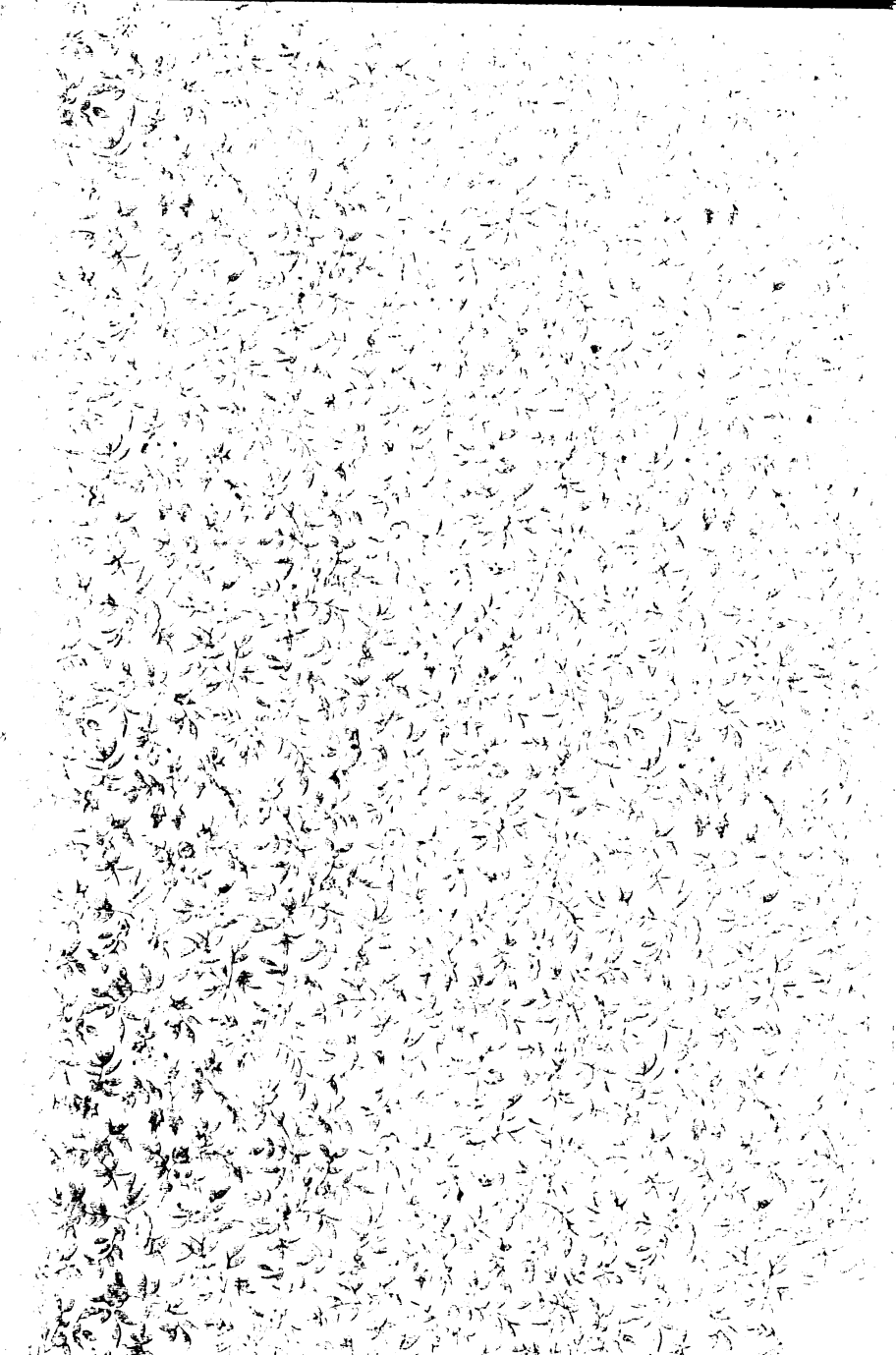

"'Why, Uncle Sloan, is that you?' exclaimed Mark."—Page 7.
Mark Mason's Victory.

MARK MASON'S VICTORY

THE TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS OF A TELEGRAPH BOY.

By HORATIO ALGER, Jr.,

Author of "Joe's Luck," "Tom the Bootblack," "Dan the Newsboy," "The Errand Boy," etc., etc.

ILLUSTRATED.

NEW YORK:
A. L. BURT, PUBLISHER.

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MARK MASON'S VICTORY.

By Horatio Alger, Jr.

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MARK MASON'S VICTORY.

CHAPTER I.

TWO STRANGERS FROM SYRACUSE.

"THAT is the City Hall over there, Edgar."

The speaker was a man of middle age, with a thin face and a nose like a Hawk. He was well dressed, and across his vest was visible a showy gold chain with a cameo charm attached to it.

The boy, probably about fifteen, was the image of his father. They were crossing City Hall Park in New York and Mr. Talbot was pointing out to his son the public buildings which make this one of the noted localities in the metropolis.

"Shine?" asked a bootblack walking up to the pair.

"I'd like to take a shine, father," said Edgar. "What do you charge?"

"Five cents, but I don't object to a dime," replied the bootblack.

"Can I have a shine, father?"

"Why didn't you get one at the hotel?"

"Because they charged ten cents. I thought I could get it for less outside."

"Good boy!" said the father in a tone of approval. "Get things as low as you can. That's my motto, and that's the way I got rich. Here, boy, you can get to work."

Instantly the bootblack was on his knees, and signed for Edgar to put his foot on the box.

"What's your name, boy?" asked Edgar with a condescending tone.

"No, it ain't boy. It's Tom."

"Well, Tom, do you make much money?"

"Well, I don't often make more'n five dollars a day."

"Five dollars? You are trying to humbug me."

"It's true though. I never made more'n five dollars in a day in my life, 'cept when I shined shoes for swells like you who were liberal with their cash."

Edgar felt rather flattered to be called a swell, but a little alarmed at the suggestion that Tom might expect more than the usual sum.

"That's all right, but I shall only pay you five cents."

"I knew you wouldn't as soon as I saw you."

"Why?"

"'Cause you don't look like George W. Childs."

"Who's he?"

"The *Ledger* man from Philadelphia. I once blacked his shoes and he gave me a quarter. General Washington once paid me a dollar."

"What!" ejaculated Edgar. "Do you mean to say that you ever blacked General Washington's shoes?"

"No; he wore boots."

"Why, my good boy, General Washington died almost a hundred years ago."

"Did he? Well, it might have been some other general."

"I guess it was. You don't seem to know much about history."

"No, I don't. I spent all my time studyin' 'stronomy when I went to school."

"What's your whole name?"

"Tom Trotter. I guess you've heard of my father. He's Judge Trotter of the Supreme Court?"

"I am afraid you don't tell the truth very often."

"No, I don't. It ain't healthy. Do you?"

"Of course I do."

This conversation was not heard by Mr. Talbot, who had taken a seat on one of the park benches, and was busily engaged in reading the morning *World*.

By this time Tom began to think it was his time to ask questions.

"Where did you come from?" he inquired.

"How do you know but I live in the city?"

"'Cause you ain't got New York style."

"Oh!" said Edgar rather mortified. Then he added in a tone which he intended to be highly sarcastic: "I suppose you have."

"Well, I guess. You'd ought to see me walk down Fifth Avener Sunday mornin' with my best girl."

"Do you wear the same clothes you've got on now?"

"No, I guess not. I've got a little Lord Fauntleroy suit of black velvet, with kid gloves and all the fixin's. But you ain't told me where you live yet."

"I live in Syracuse. My father's one of the most prominent citizens of that city."

"Is it the man you was walkin' with?"

"Yes; there he is sitting on that bench."

"He ain't much to look at. You look just like him."

"Really, I think you are the most impudent boy I ever met!" said Edgar with asperity.

"Why, what have I said? I only told you you looked like him."

"Yes, but you said he wasn't much to look at!"

"I guess he's rich, and that's better than good looks."

"Yes, my father is quite wealthy," returned Edgar complacently.

"I wish I was rich instead of good lookin'."

"You good looking!"

"That's what everybody says. I ain't no judge myself."

Tom looked roguishly at Edgar, and his aristocratic patron was obliged to confess that he had a pleasant face, though it was marred by a black spot on each cheek, probably caused by the contact of his hands.

"You're a queer boy," said Edgar. "I don't know what to make of you."

"Make a rich man of me, and we'll go to Europe together. My doctor says I ought to travel for my health."

"Edgar, haven't you got your shoes blacked yet?" asked his father from the bench.

Tom struck the box sharply with his brush to show that the job was completed.

"Just got done, governor," he said familiarly.

"Here is your money," said Edgar, producing some pennies from his pockets.

"There's only four," observed Tom with a critical glance.

"Only four! Haven't you dropped one?"

"No. That's all you gave me."

"Father, have you got a cent?"

Mr. Talbot's hand dived into his pocket, and he brought out a penny, but it was a Canadian coin.

"I don't know as I can pass this," said Tom. "They're very particular at the Windsor Hotel, where I am boarding."

"You can save it till you go traveling in Canada," suggested Edgar, with unusual brightness for him.

"That's so," answered Tom, who appreciated a joke. "I'll stop in Syracuse on the way and pay you a visit."

"How does he know about our living in Syracuse?" asked Mr. Talbot.

"I told him I lived there."

"He said you was a big bug up there."

"I hope you didn't use that expression, Edgar," said his father.

"Oh well, that's what he meant. Won't you have a shine yourself, governor?"

"No; I don't think I shall need it."

"Where'd you get that shine you've got on?"

"In Syracuse."

"Tell 'em they don't understand shinin' boots up there."

"Hadn't you better go up there and give them some lessons?" suggested Edgar.

"Well, I don't mind, if I can get free board at your house."

"Do you think we would have a bootblack living in our house?"

"Don't waste any time on him, Edgar. He is a street boy, and his manners are fitted to his station."

"Thank you, governor. That's the biggest compliment I've had for a long time."

Mr. Talbot laughed.

"Really, boy, you are very grotesque."

"That's another compliment," said Tom, taking off his hat and bowing with mock politeness.

"Hallo, Tom!"

Tom turned to meet the smile of a District Telegraph messenger, who was crossing the park to Broadway.

"How's yourself, Mark?" he said. "I'd offer to shake hands, but I've been doin' a little business for these gentlemen, and my gloves ain't handy."

No. 79, following the direction of Tom's nod, glanced at Mr. Talbot and Edgar, and instantly a look of surprise came over his face.

"Why, Uncle Solon, is that you?" he exclaimed.

Solon Talbot looked embarrassed, and seemed in

doubt whether to acknowledge his relationship to the humble telegraph boy.

"Are you Mark Mason?" he asked.

'Yes; don't you know me?"

"I haven't seen you for two years, you know."

"And this is Edgar!" continued the telegraph boy. "You've grown so I would hardly know you."

"I hope you are well," said Edgar coldly.

"Thank you. Uncle Solon, where are you staying."

"Ahem! I am stopping up town."

"Shall you be in the city long?"

"I don't think so."

"Mother would like very much to see you. She would like to ask about grandfather's estate."

"Ah—um—yes! Where do you live?"

"No. 174 St. Mark's Place, near First Avenue."

"We'll call if we can. Edgar, we'll have to hurry away."

As they walked toward the other side of the park at a brisk pace, Tom asked: "You don't mean to say that's your uncle, Mark?"

"Yes; that is, he married my mother's sister."

"And that young swell is your cousin?"

"Yes."

"He is rich, isn't he?"

"I suppose so."

"Why don't he do something for you and your mother?"

"He was always a very selfish man. But we don't ask any favors—mother and I don't. All we ask is justice."

"What do you mean by that?"

"My grandfather, that is mother's father and Mrs. Talbot's, died two years ago, and Uncle Solon was the administrator. We supposed he had left a good deal of money, but all we have received from his estate is seventy-five dollars."

"Do you think the old feller's been playin' any game on you?"

"I don't know what to think."

"I tell you what, Mark, he deserves a good lickin' if he's cheated you, and I'd like to give it to him."

"Well, Tom, I must be going. I can't stop talking here, or I'll get into trouble at the office."

CHAPTER II.

WHERE MARK LIVED.

THERE is a large tenement house on St. Mark's Place, between Third Avenue and Avenue A. The suites of rooms consist, as is the general New York custom in tenement houses, of one square apartment used as kitchen, sitting room and parlor combined, and two small bedrooms opening out of it.

It was in an apartment of this kind on the third floor back, that Mark Mason's mother and little sister Edith lived. It was a humble home, and plainly furnished, but a few books and pictures saved from the wreck of their former prosperity, gave the rooms an air of refinement not to be found in those of their neighbors.

Mrs. Mason was setting the table for supper and Edith was studying a lesson in geography when the door opened and Mark entered.

His mother greeted him with a pleasant smile.

"You are through early, Mark," she said.

"Yes, mother. I was let off earlier than usual,

as there was an errand up this way that fortunately took very little time."

"I'm glad you've come home, Mark," said Edith, "I want you to help me in my map questions."

"All right, Edie, but you will have to wait till after supper. I've got something to tell mother."

"What is it, Mark?"

"I saw two old acquaintances of ours from Syracuse, this forenoon."

"Who were they?" asked Mrs. Mason eagerly.

"Uncle Solon and Edgar."

"Is it possible? Where did you see them?"

"In City Hall Park. Edgar had just been haveing his boots blacked by Tom Trotter."

"Did you speak to them?"

"Yes."

"How did they appear?"

"Well, they didn't fall on my neck and embrace me," answered Mark with a smile. "In fact they seemed very cool."

"And yet Solon Talbot is my brother-in-law, the husband of my only sister."

"And Edgar is my own cousin. He's an awful snob, mother, and he looks as like his father as one pea looks like another."

"Then he is not very handsome. I wish I could see them. Did you invite them to call?"

"Yes."

"And what did Solon—Mr. Talbot—say?"

"He said he *might* call, but he was in a great hurry."

"Did you remember to give him our address?"

"Yes, mother; I said you would like to see him about grandfather's estate."

"I certainly would. It seems strange, very strange—that father should have left so little money."

"We only got seventy-five dollars out of it."

"When I expected at last five thousand."

"I suspect there's been some dishonesty on the part of Uncle Solon. You know he is awfully fond of money."

"Yes, he always was."

"And Tom Trotter says that Edgar told him his father was very rich."

"It seems strange the change that has taken place. When I first knew Solon Talbot I was a young lady in society with a high position, and he was a clerk in my father's store. He was of humble parentage, though that, of course, is not to his discredit. His father used to go about sawing wood for those who chose to employ him."

"You don't mean it! You never told me that before."

"No, for I knew that Solon would be ashamed to

have it known, and as I said before it is nothing to his discredit."

"But it might prevent Edgar from putting on such airs. He looked at me as if I was an inferior being, and he didn't care to have anything to say to me."

"I hope you don't feel sensitive on that account."

"Sensitive? No. I can get along without Edgar Talbot's notice. I mean some time to stand as high or higher than Uncle Solon, and to be quite as rich."

"I hope you will, Mark, but as we are at present situated it will be hard to rise."

"Plenty of poor boys have risen, and why not I?"

"It is natural for the young to be hopeful, but I have had a good deal to depress me. Did you remember that the rent comes due the day after to-morrow?"

"How much have you towards it, mother?"

"Only five dollars, and it's eight. I don't see where the other three dollars are coming from, unless,"—and here her glance rested on the plain gold ring on her finger.

"Pledge your wedding-ring, mother!" exclaimed Mark. "Surely you don't mean that?"

"I would rather do it than lose our shelter, poor as it is."

"There must be some other way—there must be."

"You will not receive any wages till Saturday."

"No, but perhaps we can borrow something till then. There's Mrs. Mack up-stairs. She has plenty of money, though she lives in a poor way."

"There isn't much hope there, Mark. She feels poorer than I do, though I am told she has five thousand dollars out at interest."

"Never mind. I am going to try her."

"Eat your supper first."

"So I will. I shall need all the strength I can get from a good meal to confront her."

Half an hour later Mark went up-stairs and tapped at the door of the rooms above his mother's.

"Come in!" said a feeble quavering voice.

Mark opened the door and entered. In a rocking chair sat, or rather crouched, a little old woman, her face seamed and wrinkled. She had taken a comforter from the bed and wrapped it around her to keep her warm, for it was a chilly day, and there was no fire in her little stove.

"Good evening, Mrs. Mack," said Mark. "How do you feel?"

"It's a cold day," groaned the old lady. "I—I feel very uncomfortable."

"Why don't you have a fire then?"

"It's gone out, and it's so late it isn't worth while to light it again."

"But it is worth while to be comfortable," insisted Mark.

"I—I can keep warm with this comforter around me, and—fuel is high, very high."

"But you can afford to buy more when this is burned."

"No, Mark. I have to be economical—very economical. I don't want to spend all my money, and go to the poor-house."

"I don't think there's much danger of that. You've got money in the savings bank, haven't you?"

"Yes—a little, but I can't earn anything. I'm too old to work, for I am seventy-seven, and I might live years longer, you know."

"Don't you get interest on your money?"

"Yes, a little, but it costs a good deal to live."

"Well, if the interest isn't enough, you can use some of the principal. I can put you in the way of earning twenty-five cents."

"Can you?" asked the old woman eagerly. "How?"

"If you'll lend me three dollars till Saturday—I get my wages then—I'll pay you twenty-five cents for the accommodation."

"But you might not pay me," said the old woman cautiously, "and it would kill me to lose three dollars."

Mark wanted to laugh, but felt that it would not do.

"There isn't any danger," he said. "I get two weeks' pay on Saturday. It will be as much as nine dollars, so you see you are sure of getting back your money."

"I—I don't know. I am afraid."

"What are you afraid of?"

"You might get run over by the horse cars, or a truck, and then you couldn't get your money."

"I will be careful for your sake, Mrs. Mack," said Mark good-humoredly. "You'll get your money back, and twenty-five cents more."

The old woman's face was a study—between avarice on the one hand and timidity on the other.

"I—I'm afraid," she said.

She rocked to and fro in her chair in her mental perturbation, and Mark saw that his errand was a failure.

"If you change your mind, let me know," he said.

As he reached the foot of the stairs he was treated to a surprise. There, just in front of his mother's door stood Solon Talbot and Edgar.

CHAPTER III.

AN UNEXPECTED CALL.

"In what room does your mother live?" asked Solon Talbot.

"This is our home," said Mark, proceeding to open the door.

Edgar Talbot sniffed contemptuously.

"I don't see how you can live in such a mean place," he remarked.

"It is not a matter of choice," returned Mark gravely. "We have to live in a cheap tenement."

By this time the door was opened.

"Mother," said Mark, preceding the two visitors, "here are Uncle Solon and Edgar come to call on you."

Mrs. Mason's pale cheek flushed, partly with mortification at her humble surroundings, for when she first knew Solon Talbot he was only a clerk, as she had said, and she was a society belle.

There was another feeling also. She had a strong

suspicion that her brother-in-law had defrauded he of her share in her father's estate.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Talbot," she said, extending her hand. "And this is Edgar! How you have grown, Edgar."

"Yes, ma'am," responded Edgar stiffly.

Both Mrs. Mason and Mark noticed that he did not call her "aunt." Her nephew's coldness chilled her.

"I am sorry to see you in such a poor place," she said, smiling faintly.

"I suppose rents are high in New York," said Solon Talbot awkwardly.

"Yes, and our means are small. How is my sister Mary?"

"Quite well, thank you."

"Did she send me any message?"

"She did not know I was going to call."

"How long it seems since I saw her!" sighed Mrs. Mason.

"I suppose you heard that I was in town."

"Yes; Mark told me."

"I was not sure whether I could call, as I am here on a hurried business errand."

"I am glad you have called. I wished to ask you about father's estate."

"Just so! It is very surprising—I assure you

that it amazed me very much—to find that he left so little."

"I can't understand it at all, Solon. Only a year before he died he told me that he considered himself worth fifteen thousand dollars."

"People are often deluded as to the amount of their possessions. I have known many such cases."

"But I have only received seventy-five dollars, and there were two heirs—Mary and myself. According to that father must have left only one hundred and fifty dollars."

"Of course he left more, but there were debts—and funeral expenses and doctor's bills."

"I understand that, but it seems so little."

"It *was* very little, and I felt sorry, not only on your account, but on Mary's. Of course, as my wife, she will be provided for, but it would have been comfortable for her to inherit a fair sum."

"You can imagine what it is to me who am not amply provided for. I thought there might be five thousand dollars coming to me."

Solon Talbot shook his head.

"That anticipation was very extravagant!" he said.

"It was founded on what father told me."

"True; but I think your father's mind was weak-

ened towards the end of his life. He was not really responsible for what he said."

"I disagree with you there, Solon. Father seemed to me in full possession of his faculties to the last."

"You viewed him through the eyes of filial affection, but I was less likely to be influenced in my judgments."

"Five thousand dollars would have made me so happy. We are miserably poor, and Mark has to work so hard to support us in this poor way."

"I thought telegraph boys earned quite a snug income," said Solon Talbot, who looked uncomfortable.

He was dreading every moment that his sister-in-law would ask him for pecuniary assistance. He did not understand her independent nature. Her brother-in-law was about the last man to whom she would have stooped to beg a favor.

"Mark sometimes makes as high as five dollars a week," said Mrs. Mason in a tone of mild sarcasm.

"I am sure that is very good pay for a boy of his age."

"It is a small sum for a family of three persons to live upon, Solon."

"Um, ah! I thought perhaps you might earn something else."

"Sometimes I earn as high as a dollar and a half a week making shirts."

Mr. Talbot thought it best to drop the subject.

"I am deeply sorry for you," he said. "It is a pity your husband didn't insure his life. He might have left you in comfort."

"He did make application for insurance, but his lungs were already diseased, and the application was refused."

"I may be able to help you—in a small way, of course," proceeded Solon Talbot.

Mark looked up in surprise. Was it possible that his close-fisted uncle was offering to assist them.

Mrs. Mason did not answer, but waited for developments.

"I have already paid you seventy-five dollars from your father's estate," resumed Mr. Talbot. "Strictly speaking, it is all you are entitled to. But I feel for your position, and—and your natural disappointment, and I feel prompted to make it a hundred dollars by paying you twenty-five dollars more. I have drafted a simple receipt here, which I will get you to sign, and then I will hand you the money."

He drew from his wallet a narrow slip of paper, on which was written this form:

"Received from Solon Talbot the sum of One Hundred Dollars, being the full amount due me from the estate of my late father, Elisha Doane, of which he is the administrator."

Mr. Talbot placed the paper on the table, and pointing to a black line below the writing, said, "Sign here."

"Let me see the paper, mother," said Mark.

He read it carefully.

"I advise you not to sign it," he added, looking up.

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Solon Talbot angrily.

"I mean," returned Mark firmly, "that mother has no means of knowing that a hundred dollars is all that she is entitled to from grandfather's estate."

"Didn't I tell you it was?" demanded Talbot frowning.

"Uncle Solon," said Mark calmly, "I am only a boy, but I know that one can't be too careful in business matters."

"Do you dare to doubt my father's word?" blustered Edgar.

"Our business is with your father, not with you," said Mark.

"What is it you want?" asked Solon Talbot irritably.

"I want, or rather mother does, to see a detailed statement of grandfather's property, and the items of his debts and expenses."

Solon Talbot was quite taken aback, by Mark's demand. He had supposed the boy knew nothing of business.

"Really," he said, "this impertinence from my own nephew is something I was by no means prepared for. It is a poor return for my liberal offer."

"Your liberal offer?"

"Yes, the twenty-five dollars I offered your mother is out of my own pocket—offered solely out of consideration for her poverty. Do I understand," he asked, addressing his sister-in-law, "that you decline my offer?"

Mrs. Mason looked doubtfully at Mark. Twenty-five dollars in their present circumstances would be a boon, and, in addition to Mark's earnings, would tide them over at least three months. Was it right, or wise, to decline it?

Mark's face showed no signs of wavering. He was calm and resolute.

"What do you think, Mark?" asked his mother.

"You know what I think, mother. We have no knowledge that the estate has been fairly administered, and you would be bartering away our rights."

"I think I won't sign the receipt, Solon," said Mrs. Mason.

Solon Talbot looked very angry.

"Then," he replied, "I cannot give you the twenty-five dollars. Edgar, we will go."

"Give my love to Mary," faltered Mrs. Mason.

Solon Talbot deigned no answer, but strode from the room with angry look.

"Mother, I am convinced that Uncle Solon was trying to swindle us," said Mark.

"I hope we have done right, Mark," rejoined his mother doubtfully.

"What is this, mother?" asked Mark, as he picked up from the floor a letter partially torn.

"It must have been dropped by Solon Talbot."

CHAPTER IV.

A NIGHT AT DALY'S.

"I WILL read this letter to see if it is of any importance," said Mark. "In that case I will forward it to Syracuse."

He read as follows:

"WALL STREET EXCHANGE.

"DEAR SIR: In reference to the mining stock about which you inquire, our information is that the mine is a valuable one, and very productive. The stock is held in few hands, and it is difficult to obtain it. You tell me that it belongs to an estate of which you are the administrator. I advise you to hold it awhile longer before you seek to dispose of it. We are about to send an agent to Nevada to look after some mining interests of our own, and will authorize him also to look up the Golden Hope mine.

"Yours truly,

"CRANE & LAWTON,

"STOCK AND MINING BROKERS."

Mother and son looked at each other significantly.

Finally Mark said, "This mining stock must have belonged to grandfather."

"Yes; I remember now his alluding to having purchased a hundred shares of some mine."

"The brokers say they are valuable. Yet Uncle Solon has never said anything about them. Mother, he means to defraud us of our share in this property, supposing that we will hear nothing about it."

"How shameful!" exclaimed Mrs. Mason indignantly. "I will sit right down and write him a letter taxing him with his treachery."

"No, mother; I don't want you to do anything of the kind."

"You don't want us to submit to imposition? That don't sound like you, Mark."

"I mean that he shall give us whatever is our due, but I don't want him to suspect that we know anything of his underhand schemes. He hasn't sold the mining stock yet."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Leave the matter in my hands, mother. I will keep the letter, and it will always be evidence against him. He is shrewd, and will get full value for the stock. Then we can make him hand you your share."

"If you think that is best, Mark," said Mrs. Mason doubtfully. "I haven't much of a head for business."

"I think I have, mother. There is nothing I like better."

"Did you see Mrs. Mack about a loan? I didn't think to ask you, as your uncle came in with you when you returned from up-stairs."

"Yes, I saw her, but it was of no use."

"Then she won't lend us the money?"

"No, she is afraid to, though I offered her twenty-five cents interest. I told her that I should have nine dollars coming in on Saturday, but she thought something might prevent my getting it."

"Then I had better pawn my ring. The landlord won't wait even a day for his money."

"Don't be in a hurry, mother. The rent is not due till day after to-morrow, and something may happen between now and then to put me in funds."

"Perhaps you are right, Mark."

Five minutes later there was a knock at the door. Opening it, Mark saw another telegraph boy in the entrance. He had a paper in his hand.

"You're to go there," he said, handing Mark a card. "Put on your best clothes. It's a lady to take to the theater."

"All right, Jimmy. I'll be ready in a jiffy. Do you know what theater?"

"No, I don't. The lady will tell you."

"Mother, I'll be home late," said Mark. "I must put on some clean clothes. Is my collar dirty?"

"Yes, you had better put on a clean one. I don't like your being out so late. I thought you were through for the day."

"I'll get extra pay, mother, and every little helps."

"I say, Mark," said Jimmy, "you'd better wear your dress suit and diamond scarf-pin."

"I would, Jimmy, only I lent 'em both to a boot-black of my acquaintance who's going to attend a ball on Fifth Avenue to-night."

Jimmy laughed.

"You've always got an answer ready, Mark," he said. "Well, so long! Hope you'll have a good time."

"Where does the lady live, Mark?" asked Mrs. Mason.

"At No. 90 West Forty-Fifth Street. I haven't much time to spare. I must go as soon as I can get ready."

It was half-past seven o'clock before Mark rang the bell at a fine brown stone house on West Forty-Fifth Street. The door was opened by a colored servant, who, without speaking to Mark, turned his head, and called out: "The messenger's come, Miss Maud."

"I'm *so* glad," said a silvery voice, as a young lady of twenty, already dressed for the street, came out of a room on the left of the hall. Mark took off his hat politely.

"So you are the messenger boy?" she said. "You are to take me to Daly's Theater."

"Yes, miss. So I heard."

"Let us go at once. We will take the horse cars at Sixth Avenue, and get out at Thirtieth Street."

Before she had finished they were already in the street.

"I must explain," she said, "that my uncle bought two tickets this morning and expected to accompany me, but an important engagement has prevented. I was resolved to go, and so I sent for a messenger. Perhaps you had better take the tickets."

"All right, Miss——."

"Gilbert. As you are to be my escort I will ask your name."

"Mark Mason."

"Shall I call you Mark, or Mr. Mason?" she asked with a roguish smile.

"I would rather you would call me Mark."

"Perhaps, as you are taking the place of my uncle, it would be proper to call you Uncle Mark," she laughed.

"All right, if you prefer it," said Mark.

"On the whole I won't. I am afraid you don't look the character. Are you quite sure you can protect me?"

"I'll try to, Miss Gilbert."

"Then I won't borrow any trouble."

Maud Gilbert had carefully observed Mark, and as he was an attractive-looking boy she felt satisfied with the selection made for her.

"I am glad you didn't wear your uniform," she said. "I forgot to speak about that."

"When I heard what I was wanted for I thought it would be better to leave off the uniform," said Mark.

"That was right. Now I can pass you off as a young friend. If I meet any young lady friend, don't call me Miss Gilbert, but call me Maud. Perhaps you had better call me that at any rate."

"I will—Maud."

"That's right, and I will call you—let me see, Cousin Mark. I don't want my friends to think I had to send for an escort to a telegraph office."

When they entered Daly's Miss Gilbert met an old school friend—Louisa Morton.

"Why, Maud, are you here?" said her friend. "How delightful! And who is this young gentleman?"

"My cousin, Mark Mason."

"Indeed! Well, I congratulate you on having such a nice escort. If he were a few years older I might try to make you jealous."

Maud laughed gaily.

"Oh, you can't get him away. He is devoted to me. Aren't you, Cousin Mark?"

Mark was about to say "You bet," but it occurred to him that this would not be *comme il faut*, so he only said, "You are right, Maud."

"Where are your seats? I hope they are near ours."

They proved to be in the same row, but on the other side of the center aisle.

As Mark and the young lady took seats two pairs of astonished eyes noted their entrance. These belonged to Edgar and his father, who sat two rows behind. Edgar was the first to catch sight of them.

"Look, father!" he said, clutching his father's arm. "There is Mark Mason and a beautiful girl just taking their seats. What does it mean?"

"I don't know," returned Mr. Talbot. "She seems to be a fashionable young lady."

"How in the world did he get acquainted with such people? She treats him as familiarly as if he were a brother or cousin."

"It is very strange."

"Please take the opera-glass, Mark," Edgar heard Miss Gilbert say. "You know I must make you useful."

For the rest of the evening the attention of Edgar and his father was divided between the play and Miss Gilbert and Mark. For the benefit chiefly of her friend, Maud treated her young escort with the utmost familiarity, and quite misled Solon Talbot and Edgar.

When the play was over Mark carefully adjusted Miss Gilbert's wraps. As he passed through the aisle he saw for the first time Edgar and his father looking at him with astonished eyes.

"Good evening," he said with a smile. "I hope you enjoyed the play."

"Come, Mark, it is growing late," said Maud.

Mark bowed and passed on.

"Well, if that doesn't beat all!" ejaculated Edgar. "They seemed very intimate."

When Mark bade Miss Gilbert good night after ringing the bell at her home, she pressed a bank note into his hand.

"Thank you so much," she said. "Keep the change, and when I want another escort I will send for you."

By the light of the street lamp Mark inspected the bill and found it was a five.

"That will give me over three dollars for myself," he said joyfully. "So the rent is secure."

The next day about two o'clock he was in the office of a prominent banker to whom he had carried a message, when a wild-looking man with light brown hair and wearing glasses, rushed in, and exclaimed dramatically to the astonished banker, "I want a hundred thousand dollars! Give it to me at once, or I will blow your office to atoms."

He pointed significantly to a small carpet bag which he carried in his left hand.

The broker turned pale, and half rose from his chair. He was too frightened to speak, while two clerks writing in another part of the office seemed ready to faint.

CHAPTER V.

MARK AS A HERO.

THE situation was critical. That the wild-eyed visitor was demented, there was hardly a doubt, but his madness was of a most dangerous character.

The eyes of all were fixed with terror upon the innocent-looking valise which he held in his left hand, and in the mind of all was the terrible thought, DYNAMITE!

"Well, will you give me the money?" demanded the crank fiercely.

"I—I don't think I have as much money in the office," stammered the pallid banker.

"That won't work," exclaimed the visitor angrily. "If you can't find it I will send you where you won't need money," and he moved his arm as if to throw the valise on the floor.

"I—I'll give you a check," faltered Luther Rockwell, the banker.

"And stop payment on it," said the crank with a cunning look. "No, that won't do."

Give me half an hour to get the money," pleaded Rockwell desperately. "Perhaps twenty minutes will do."

"You would send for a policeman," said the intruder. "That won't do, I must have the money now. Or, if you haven't got it, bonds will answer."

Luther Rockwell looked helplessly toward the two clerks, but they were even more terrified than he. There was one to whom he did not look for help, and that was the telegraph boy, who stood but three feet from the crank, watching him sharply. For a plan of relief had come into the mind of Mark Mason, who, though he appreciated the danger, was cooler and more self-possessed than any one else in the office.

Standing just behind the crank, so that he did not attract his attention, he swiftly signaled to the clerks, who saw the signal but did not know what it meant. Mark had observed that the dangerous satchel was held loosely in the hands of the visitor whose blazing eyes were fixed upon the banker. The telegraph boy had made up his mind to take a desperate step, which depended for its success on rapid execution and unfaltering nerves.

Luther Rockwell was hesitating what reply to make to his visitor's demand when Mark, with one step forward, snatched the valise from the unsuspect-

ing visitor and rapidly retreated in the direction of the two clerks.

"Now do your part!" he exclaimed in keen excitement.

The crank uttered a howl of rage, and turning his fierce, bloodshot eyes upon Mark dashed towards him.

The two clerks were now nerved up to action. They were not cowards, but the nature of the peril had dazed them. One was a member of an athletic club, and unusually strong.

They dashed forward and together seized the madman. Mr. Rockwell, too, sprang from his seat, and, though an old man, joined the attacking party.

"Quick!" he shouted to Mark. "Take that valise out of the office, and carry it where it will do no harm. Then come back!"

Mark needed no second bidding. He ran out of the office and down-stairs, never stopping till he reached the nearest police station. Quickly he told his story, and two policemen were despatched on a run to Mr. Rockwell's office.

They arrived none too soon. The crank appeared to have the strength of three men, and it seemed doubtful how the contest between him and the three who assailed him would terminate.

The two policemen turned the scale. They dex-

terously slipped handcuffs over his wrists, and at last he sank to the floor conquered. He was panting and frothing at the mouth.

Luther Rockwell fell back into his seat exhausted.

"You've had a trying time, sir!" said one of the policemen respectfully.

"Yes," ejaculated the banker with dry lips. "I wouldn't pass through it again for fifty thousand dollars. I've been as near a terrible death as any man can be—and live! But for the heroism of that boy—where is he?"

The question was answered by the appearance of Mark Mason himself, just returned from the police station.

"But for you," said the banker gratefully, "we should all be in eternity."

"I too!" answered Mark.

"Let me get at him!" shrieked the crank, eying Mark with a demoniac hatred. "But for him I should have succeeded."

"Was there really dynamite in the bag?" asked one of the policemen.

"Yes," answered Mark. "The sergeant opened it in my presence. He said there was enough dynamite to blow up the biggest building in the city."

"What is going to be done with it?" asked the banker anxiously.

"The policemen were starting with it for the North River."

"That's the only safe place for it."

"If you have no further use for this man we'll carry him to the station-house," said one of the officers.

"Yes, yes, take him away!" ejaculated the banker with a shudder.

Struggling fiercely, the crank was hurried down the stairs by the two official guardians, and then Mr. Rockwell, who was an old man, quietly fainted away.

When he came to, he said feebly, "I am very much upset. I think I will go home. Call a cab, my boy."

Mark soon had one at the door.

"Now, I want you to go with me and see me home. I don't dare to go by myself."

Mark helped the old gentleman into his cab, and up the stairs of his dwelling. Mr. Rockwell paid the cab driver adding. "Take this boy back to my office. What is your name, my boy?"

"Mark Mason, No. 79."

Luther Rockwell scribbled a few lines on a leaf torn from his memorandum book, and gave it to Mark.

"Present that at the office," he said. "Come round next week and see me."

"Yes, sir," answered Mark respectfully, and sprang into the cab.

As he was riding through Madison Avenue he noticed from the window his uncle Solon and Edgar walking slowly along on the left hand side. At the same moment they espied him.

"Look, father!" cried Edgar in excitement "Mark Mason is riding in that cab."

"So he is!" echoed Mr. Talbot in surprise.

Catching their glance, Mark smiled and bowed. He could understand their amazement, and he enjoyed it.

Mechanically Mr. Talbot returned the salutation, but Edgar closed his lips very firmly and refused to take any notice of his cousin.

"I don't understand it," he said to his father, when the cab had passed. "Doesn't it cost a good deal to ride in a cab in New York?"

"Yes. I never rode in one but once, and then I had to pay two dollars."

"And yet Mark Mason, who is little more than a beggar, can afford to ride! And last evening he was at the theater in company with a fashionable young lady. Telegraph boys must get higher pay than he said."

"Perhaps, Edgar," suggested his father with an attempt at humor, "you would like to become a telegraph boy yourself.

"I'd scorn to go into such a low business."

"Well, I won't urge you to do so."

Meanwhile Mark continued on his way in the cab. As he passed City Hall Park Tom Trotter, who had just finished shining a gentleman's boots, chanced to look towards Broadway. As he saw his friend Mark leaning back in the cab, his eyes opened wide.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" he exclaimed. "How's that for puttin' on style? Fust thing you know Mark Mason will have his name down wid de Four Hundred!"

It did not occur to Mark to look at the paper given him by Mr. Rockwell till he got out of the cab.

This was what he read:

MR. NICHOLS: Give this boy ten dollars.

LUTHER ROCKWELL.

His eyes flashed with delight.

"This is a lucky day!" he exclaimed. "It's worth while running the risk of being blown up when you're so well paid for it."

Nichols, the chief clerk, at once complied with his employer's directions.

"You're a brave boy, 79," he said. "If it hadn't been for you, we'd all have been blown higher than a kite. How did you leave Mr. Rockwell?"

"He seems pretty well upset," answered Mark.

"No wonder; he's an old man. I don't mind saying I was upset myself, and I am less than half his age. You were the only one of us that kept his wits about him."

"Somehow I didn't think of danger," said Mark. "I was considering how I could get the better of the crank."

"You took a great risk. If the valise had fallen, we'd have all gone up, and he pointed significantly overhead. "I am glad Mr. Rockwell has given you something. If he had given you a hundred dollars, or a thousand, it wouldn't have been too much."

"He told me to call at the office next week."

"Don't forget to do it. It will be to your interest."

CHAPTER VI.

"THE EVENING GLOBE."

WHILE Mark was passing through these exciting scenes Mrs. Mason went about her daily duties at home, anxiously considering how the rent was to be paid on the following day. Mark had not told her of his gift from Maud Gilbert, intending it as a surprise.

As she was washing the breakfast dishes, there was a little tap at the door. To her surprise, the visitor turned out to be Mrs. Mack, of the floor above, to whom Mark had applied for a loan without success. As Mrs. Mack seldom left her room, Mrs. Mason regarded her with surprise.

"Come in and sit down, Mrs. Mack, she said kindly.

She had no regard for the old woman, but felt that she deserved some consideration on account of her great age.

Mrs. Mack hobbled in and seated herself in a rocking-chair.

"I hope you are well," said Mrs. Mason.

"Tollable, tollable," answered the old woman, glancing curiously about the room, as if making an inventory of what it contained.

"Can't I give you a cup of tea? At your age it will be strengthening."

"I'm not so very old," said the old woman querulously. "I'm only seventy-seven, and my mother lived to be eighty-seven."

"I hope you will live as long as you wish to. But, Mrs. Mack, you must make yourself comfortable. Old people live longer if they live in comfort. Will you have the tea?"

"I don't mind," answered Mrs. Mack, brightening up at the prospect of this unwonted luxury.

She did not allow herself tea every day, on account of its cost. There are many foolish people in the world, but among the most foolish are those who deny themselves ordinary comforts in order to save money for their heirs.

The tea was prepared, and the old woman drank it with evident enjoyment.

"Your boy came up yesterday to borrow three dollars," she began then, coming to business.

"Yes, he told me so."

"He said he'd pay me Saturday night."

"Yes, he gets two weeks' pay then."

"I—I was afraid he might not pay me back, and I can't afford to lose so much money. I'm a poor old woman."

"Mark would have paid you back. He always pays his debts."

"Yes; I think he is a good boy. If I thought he would pay me back, I—I think I would lend him the money. He offered to pay me interest."

"Yes; he would pay you for the favor."

"If—if he will pay me four dollars on Saturday night I will lend him what he wants."

"What!" ejaculated Mrs. Mason. "Do you propose to ask him a dollar for the use of three dollars for two or three days?"

"It's—it's a great risk!" mumbled Mrs. Mack.

"There is no risk at all. To ask such interest as that would be sheer robbery. We are poor and we can't afford to pay it."

"I am a poor old woman."

"You are not poor at all. You are worth thousands of dollars."

"Who said so?" demanded Mrs. Mack in alarm.

"Everybody knows it."

"It's—it's a mistake, a great mistake. I—I can't earn anything. I'm too old to work. I don't want to die in a poorhouse."

"You would live a great deal better in a poor-

house than you live by yourself. I decline your offer, Mrs. Mack. I would rather pawn my wedding ring, as I proposed to Mark. That would only cost me nine cents in place of the dollar that you demand."

The old woman looked disappointed. She had thought of the matter all night with an avaricious longing for the interest that she expected to get out of Mark, and she had no thought that her offer would be declined.

"Never mind about business, Mrs. Mack!" said Mrs. Mason more kindly, as she reflected that the old woman could not change her nature. "Won't you have another cup of tea, and I can give you some toast, too, if you think you would like it."

An expression of pleasure appeared on the old woman's face.

"If—it's handy," she said. "I don't always make tea, for it is too much trouble."

It is safe to say that Mrs. Mack thoroughly enjoyed her call, though she did not effect the loan she desired to make. When she rose to go, Mrs. Mason invited her to call again.

"I always have tea, or I can make it in five minutes," she said.

"Thank you kindly, ma'am; I will come," she said, "if it isn't putting you to too much trouble."

"Mother," said Edith, after the visitor had hobbled

up-stairs, "I wouldn't give tea to that stingy old woman."

"My dear child, she is old, and though she is not poor, she thinks she is, which is almost as bad. If I can brighten her cheerless life in any way, I am glad to do so."

About one o'clock a knock was heard at the door. Mrs. Mason answered it in person, and to her surprise found in the caller a brisk-looking young man, with an intelligent face. He had a note-book in his hand.

"Is this Mrs. Mason?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir."

"Your son is a telegraph boy?"

"Yes."

"No. 79?"

"Yes, sir. Has anything happened to him?" she asked in quick alarm.

"I bring no bad news," answered the young man with a smile. "Have you a photograph or even a tintype of your son, recently taken?"

"I have a tintype taken last summer at Coney Island."

"That will do. Will you lend it to me till to-morrow?"

"But what can you possibly want with Mark's picture?" asked the mother, feeling quite bewildered.

"I represent the *Daily Globe*, Mrs. Mason. His picture is to appear in the evening edition."

"But why should you publish Mark's picture?"

"Because he has distinguished himself by a heroic action. I can't stop to give you particulars, for I ought to be at the office now, but I will refer you to the paper."

With the tintype in his hand the reporter hurried to the office of the journal he represented, leaving Mrs. Mason in a state of wondering perplexity.

Within an incredibly short time hundreds of newsboys were running through the streets crying "Extry! Extra! A dynamite crank at the office of Luther Rockwell, the great banker!"

Mark Mason was returning from a trip to Brooklyn, when a newsboy thrust the paper in his face.

"Here, Johnny, give me that paper!" he said.

The boy peered curiously at him.

"Ain't you Mark Mason?" he asked.

"Yes; how did you know me?"

"Your picture is in the paper."

Mark opened the paper in natural excitement, and being a modest boy, blushed as he saw his picture staring at him from the front page, labeled underneath "The Heroic Telegraph Boy." He read the account, which was quite correctly written, with a

mixture of emotions, among which gratification predominated.

"But where did they get my picture?" he asked himself.

There was also a picture of the dynamite crank, which was also tolerably accurate.

"I must take this home to mother," said Mark, folding up the paper. "Won't she be surprised!"

About the same time Solon Talbot and Edgar were in the Grand Central Depot on Forty-Second Street. Their visit was over, and Mr. Talbot had purchased the return tickets.

"You may buy a couple of evening papers, Edgar," said his father.

One of them selected was the *Evening Globe.*

Edgar uttered an exclamation as he opened it.

"What's the matter, Edgar?" asked his father.

"Just look at this! Here's Mark Mason's picture in the paper!"

"What nonsense you talk!" said Solon Talbot.

"No, I don't. Here is the picture, and here is his name!" said Edgar triumphantly.

Solon Talbot read the account in silence.

"I see," said another Syracuse man coming up, "you are reading the account of the daring attempt to blow up banker Rockwell's office!"

"Yes," answered Solon.

"That was a brave telegraph boy who seized the bag of dynamite."

"Very true!" said Solon, unable to resist the temptation to shine by the help of the nephew whom he had hitherto despised. "That boy is my own nephew!"

"You don't say so!"

"Yes; his mother is the sister of my wife."

"But how does he happen to be a telegraph boy."

"A whim of his. He is a very independent boy, and he insisted on entering the messenger service."

"Be that as it may, you have reason to be proud of him."

Edgar said nothing, but he wished that just for this once he could change places with his poor cousin.

"I'd have done the same if I'd had the chance," he said to himself.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GREAT MR. BUNSBY.

"So you have become quite a hero, Mark," said his mother smiling, as Mark entered the house at half-past six.

"Have you heard of it then, mother?" asked the messenger boy.

"Yes, a little bird came and told me."

"I suppose you saw the *Evening Globe*."

"Yes, I sent Edith out to buy a copy."

"But how did you know it contained anything about me?"

"Because a reporter came to me for your picture."

"That explains it. I couldn't understand how they got that."

"It makes me shudder, Mark, when I think of the risk you ran. How did you dare to go near that terrible man?"

"I knew something must be done or we should all lose our lives. No one seemed to think what to do except myself."

"You ought to have been handsomely paid. The least Mr. Rockwell could do was to give you five dollars."

"He gave me ten, and told me to call at the office next week."

"Then," said his mother relieved, "we shall be able to pay the rent."

"That was provided for already. The young lady I escorted to the theater last evening gave me three dollars over the regular charges for my services.

"Why didn't you tell me before, Mark?"

"I ought to have done so, but I wanted it to be an agreeable surprise. So you see I have thirteen dollars on hand."

"It is a blessed relief. Oh, I mustn't forget to tell you that Mrs. Mack came in this morning to offer to lend me three dollars."

"What! has the old woman become kind-hearted all at once?"

"As to that, I think there is very little kindness in offering three dollars at thirty-three per cent. interest for three days. She was willing to lend three dollars, but demanded four dollars in return."

"It is lucky we shall not have to pay such enormous interest. Now, mother, what have you got for supper?"

"Some tea and toast, Mark."

"We must have something better. I will go out and buy a sirloin steak, and some potatoes. We will have a good supper for once."

At the entrance to the street Mark found Tom Trotter.

Tom's honest face lighted up with pleasure.

"I see you've got into de papers, Mark," he said.

"Yes, Tom."

"I wouldn't believe it when Jim Sheehan told me, but I went and bought de *Evening Globe*, and there you was!"

"I hope you'll get into the papers some time, Tom."

"There ain't no chance for me, 'cept I rob a bank. Where you goin', Mark?"

"To buy some steak for supper. Have you eaten supper yet?"

"No."

"Then come along with me, and I'll invite you to join us."

"I don't look fit, Mark."

"Never mind about your clothes, Tom. We don't generally put on dress suits. A little soap and water will make you all right."

"What'll your mudder say?"

"That any friend of mine is welcome."

So Tom allowed himself to be persuaded, and had

no reason to complain of his reception. The steak emitted appetizing odors as it was being broiled, and when at length supper was ready no one enjoyed it more than Tom.

"How do you think my mother can cook, Tom?" asked Mark.

"She beats Beefsteak John all hollow. I just wish she'd open a eaten' house."

"I'll think about it, Tom," said Mrs. Mason smiling. "Would you be one of my regular customers?"

"I would if I had money enough."

It is hard to say which enjoyed the supper most. The day before Mrs. Mason had been anxious and apprehensive, but to-day, with a surplus fund of thirteen dollars, she felt in high spirits.

This may seem a small sum to many of our readers, but to the frugal little household it meant nearly two weeks' comfort.

The table was cleared, and Mark and Tom sat down to a game of checkers. They had just finished the first game when steps were heard on the stairs. and directly there was a knock at the door.

"Go to the door, Mark," said his mother.

Mark opened the door and found himself in the presence of a stout man, rather showily dressed, and wearing a white hat.

"Is this Mark Mason?" asked the visitor.

"Yes, sir."

The visitor took out a copy of the *Evening Globe*, and compared Mark with the picture.

"Yes, I see you are," he proceeded. "You are the telegraph boy that disarmed the dynamite crank in Mr. Rockwell's office."

"Yes, sir."

"Allow me to say, young man, I wouldn't have been in your shoes at that moment for ten thousand dollars."

"I wouldn't want to go through it again myself," smiled Mark.

All the while he was wondering why the stout man should have taken the trouble to come and see him.

"Perhaps you'll know me when I tell you that I'm Bunsby," said the stout visitor drawing himself up and inflating his chest with an air of importance.

"Of Bunsby's Dime Museum?" asked Mark.

"Exactly! You've hit it the first time. Most people have heard of me," he added complacently.

"Oh yes, sir, I've heard of you often. So have you, Tom?"

"Yes," answered Tom, fixing his eyes on Mr. Bunsby with awe-struck deference, "I've been to de museum often."

"Mr. Bunsby," said Mark gravely, "this is my particular friend, Tom Trotter."

"Glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Trotter," said Mr. Bunsby, offering his hand.

Tom took it shyly, and felt that it was indeed a proud moment for him. To be called Mr. Trotter by the great Bunsby, and to have his hand shaken into the bargain, put him on a pinnacle of greatness which he had never hoped to reach.

"Won't you walk in, Mr. Bunsby? This is my mother, Mrs. Mason, and this is my sister Edith."

"Glad to meet you, ladies both! I congratulate you, Mrs. Mason, on having so distinguished a son."

"He is a good boy, Mr. Bunsby, whether he is distinguished or not."

"I have no doubt of it. In fact I am sure of it. You already know that I keep a dime museum, where, if I do say it myself, may be found an unrivaled collection of curiosities gathered from the four quarters of the globe, and where may be witnessed the most refined and recherché entertainments, which delight daily the élite of new York and the surrounding cities."

"Yes, sir," assented Mrs. Mason, rather puzzled to guess what all this had to do with her.

"I have come here to offer your son an engagement of four weeks at twenty-five dollars a week,

and the privilege of selling his photographs, with all the profits it may bring."

"But what am I to do?" asked Mark.

"Merely to sit on the platform with the other curiosities."

"But I am not a curiosity."

"I beg your pardon, my dear boy, but everybody will want to see the heroic boy who foiled a dynamite fiend and saved the life of a banker."

Somehow this proposal was very repugnant to Mark.

"Thank you, Mr. Bunsby," he said, "but I should not like to earn money in that way."

"I might say thirty dollars a week," continued Mr. Bunsby. "Come, let us strike up a bargain."

"It isn't the money. Twenty-five dollars a week is more than I could earn in any other way, but I shouldn't like to have people staring at me."

"My dear boy, you are not practical."

"I quite agree with Mark," said Mrs. Mason. "I would not wish him to become a public spectacle."

CHAPTER VIII.

A SCENE IN MRS. MACK'S ROOM.

FIFTEEN minutes before a stout, ill-dressed man of perhaps forty years of age knocked at the door of Mrs. Mack's room.

"Come in!" called the old lady in quavering accents.

The visitor opened the door and entered.

"Who are you?" asked the old lady in alarm.

"Don't you know me, Aunt Jane?" replied the intruder. "I'm Jack Minton, your nephew."

"I don't want to see you—go away!" cried Mrs. Mack.

"That's a pretty way to receive your own sister's son, whom you haven't seen for five years."

"I haven't seen you because you've been in jail," retorted his aunt in a shrill voice.

"Yes, I was took for another man," said Jack. "He stole and laid it off on to me."

"I don't care how it was, but I don't want to see you. Go away!"

"Look here, Aunt Jane, you're treating me awful

mean. I'm your own orphan nephew, and you ought to make much of me."

"An orphan—yes. You hurried your poor mother to the grave by your bad conduct," said Mrs. Mack with some emotion. "You won't find me so soft as she was."

"Soft? No, you're as hard as flint, but all the same you're my aunt, and you're rich, while I haven't a dollar to bless myself with."

"Rich! Me rich!" repeated the old lady shrilly. "You see how I live. Does it look as if I was rich?"

"Oh, you can't humbug me that way. You could live better if you wanted to."

"I'm poor—miserably poor!" returned the old woman.

"I'd like to be as poor as you are!" said Jack Minton grimly. "You're a miser, that's all there is about it. You half starve yourself and live without fire, when you might be comfortable, and all to save money. You're a fool! Do you know where all your money will go when you're dead?"

"There won't be any left."

"Won't there? I'll take the risk of that, for I shall be your heir. It'll all go to me!" said Jack, chuckling.

"Go away! Go away!" cried the terrified old woman wildly.

"I want to have a little talk with you first, aunt," said Jack, drawing the only other chair in the room in front of Mrs. Mack and sitting down on it. "You're my only relation, and we ought to have an understanding. Why, you can't live more than a year or two—at your age."

"What do you mean?" said Mrs Mack angrily. "I'm good for ten years. I'm only seventy-seven."

"You're living on borrowed time, Aunt Jane, you know that yourself. You've lived seven years beyond the regular term, and you can't live much longer."

"Go away! Go away!" said the terrified old woman, really alarmed at her nephew's prediction. "I don't want to have anything to do with you."

"Don't forget that I'm your heir."

"I can leave my money as I please—not that I've got much to leave."

"You mean you'll make a will? Well, go ahead and do it. There was a man I know made a will and he died the next day."

This shot struck home, for the old woman really had a superstitious dread of making a will.

"You're a terrible man!" she moaned. "You scare me."

"Come, aunt, be reasonable. You can leave part of your money away from me if you like, but I want

you to help me now. I'm hard up. Do you see this nickel?" and he drew one from his vest pocket.

"Yes."

"Well, it's all the money I've got. Why, I haven't eaten anything to-day, and I have no money to pay for a bed."

"I—I haven't any supper for you."

"I don't want any *here*. I wouldn't care to board with you, Aunt Jane. Why, I should soon become a bag of bones like yourself. I don't believe you've got five cents' worth of provisions in the room."

"There's half a loaf of bread in the closet."

"Let me take a look at it."

He strode to the closet and opened the door. On a shelf he saw half a loaf of bread, dry and stale. He took it in his hand, laughing.

"Why, that bread is three days' old," he said. "Where's your butter?"

"I—I don't eat butter. Its too high!"

"And you don't care to live high!" said Jack, laughing at his own joke. "I don't care to rob you of this bread, Aunt Jane. It's too rich for my blood. Don't you ever eat anything else?"

"Sometimes" she answered, hesitating.

"I'd rather take my supper at the cheapest restaurant on the Bowery. What I want is money."

Mrs. Mack uttered a little cry of alarm.

"Oh, don't go into a fit, aunt! I only want a little, just to get along till I can find work. Give me twenty-five dollars, and I won't come near you again for a month. I swear it."

"Twenty-five dollars!" ejaculated Mrs. Mack in dismay. "Do you think I am made of money?"

"I don't take you for an Astor or a Vanderbilt, Aunt Jane, but you've got a tidy lot of money somewhere—that I am sure of. I shouldn't wonder if you had five thousand dollars. Now where do you keep it?"

"Have you taken leave of your senses?" asked the old woman sharply. "No, I haven't, but it looks to me as if you had. But I can't waste my time here all night. I'm your only relative, and it's your duty to help me. Will you let me have twenty-five dollars or not?"

"No, I won't," answered Mrs. Mack angrily.

"Then I'll take the liberty of helping myself if I can find where you keep your hoards."

Jack Minton jumped up from his chair and went at once to a cheap bureau, which, however, was probably the most valuable article in the room, and pulling out the top drawer, began to rummage about among the contents. Then it was that Mrs. Mack uttered the piercing shriek referred to at the end of the last chapter, and her nephew, tramp-

ing across the floor, seized her roughly by the shoulder.

"What do you mean by this noise, you old fool?" he demanded roughly.

"Help! Murder! Thieves!" screamed the old woman.

Then the door opened, and Mark Mason burst into the room, followed by Tom Trotter.

"What's the matter, Mrs. Mack?" asked Mark.

"This man is going to rob me," answered the old woman. "Oh, save me!"

"It's a lie!" said Jack Minton. "Just ask this woman who I am. She knows."

"Who is he, Mrs. Mack?"

"It is my nephew, Jack Minton. He——"

"Do you hear that? I'm her nephew, come in to make her a call after a long time."

"What are you doing to her?" demanded Mark suspiciously.

"Trying to stop her infernal racket. You'd think I was murdering her by the way she goes on."

"What made you scream, Mrs. Mack?"

"Because he—he was going to rob me."

"How is that?" demanded Mark sternly.

"None of your business, kid! You ain't no call to interfere between me and my aunt."

"I have if she asks me to."

"He was at my bureau drawers. He told me I must give him twenty-five dollars."

"Supposing I did? It's the least you can do for your own nephew that hasn't a cent to bless himself with."

"Oh, take him away, Mark! He'll rob me first and murder me afterwards, and I'm his mother's only sister."

"You see she admits it. She's rolling in money——"

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Mack, throwing up her hands. "You know I'm poor, Mark Mason."

"No, I don't, Mrs. Mack. I think you've got all the money you need, but you have a right to keep it if you want to. Mr. Minton, you had better leave the room. Your aunt is evidently afraid of you, and, old as she is, your staying here may make her sick."

"It ain't much use living, the way she is. Aunt Jane, I ask you again will you lend me twenty-five dollars?"

"No, no!"

"Will you lend me five dollars?"

"No."

"Are you going to turn your own nephew out into the street without a cent to buy food or pay for a bed?"

He glowered at his aunt so fiercely as he said this that Mark was afraid he might strangle her.

"Mrs. Mack," he said, "you had better give him something if he is in so much need. Since he is really your nephew, you might give him a dollar on condition that he won't trouble you again."

After long persuasion the old woman was induced to do this, though she declared that it would leave her destitute, and send her to the poor-house.

"Now, Mr. Minton," said Mark, "I advise you not to come here again, or I may have to call in a policeman."

"I've a great mind to throw you down-stairs," growled Jack.

"You'd have to throw me too!" put in Tom Trotter.

"I'd do it with pleasure."

Jack left the room and steered his way to the nearest saloon, while Mark and Tom returned to the room beneath.

CHAPTER IX.

AN ADVENTURE IN A FIFTH AVENUE STAGE.

MARK did not fail to call at Mr. Rockwell's office during the following week.

Nichols, the clerk, who had already shown a friendly interest in him, received him kindly.

"Mr. Rockwell is still confined at his house," he said. "The affair of last week was a great shock to him, and, not being a strong man, he is quite prostrated."

"I am sorry to hear it," said Mark in a tone of sympathy, "but I am not surprised. That is what I read in the papers. Still, as I was asked to call at the office, I have done so."

"I am glad to see you. I hope you are getting along well."

"Oh yes, fairly well."

"How do you like being a telegraph messenger?"

"It will do very well for a boy, but it leads to nothing. I wish I could get into some position where I would be promoted."

"That will come after a while, if you show yourself faithful and reliable."

The next day Mark had a surprise. Walking past the Metropolitan Hotel, not far from Houston Street, he saw a boy just leaving the hotel whose face and figure were familiar.

"Edgar Talbot!" he exclaimed in surprise.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" said Edgar, turning at the call.

"Yes; how do you happen to visit New York again so soon?"

"We are going to move to New York," answered Edgar. "Father feels that Syracuse is too small a place for a man of his business ability," he added in a consequential tone.

"Are you going to live at the hotel?"

"No. We shall live in a nice flat up town, near the Park."

This was news indeed. Mark felt no interest in any of the family except in Mrs. Talbot, his mother's sister, who alone of all displayed a friendly regard for her poor relatives.

"Mother will be glad to hear of it," he said.

"Why?"

"Because your mother is her only sister, and she will like to call on her."

"Look here!" said Edgar. "I hope you

don't expect to be on visiting terms at our house."

"Why not? You are my own cousin, aren't you?"

"Yes, I suppose so," answered Edgar, making the admission grudgingly, "but of course there is a great difference in our social positions."

"You mean that you are rich and we are poor?"

"Yes, that's about the size of it."

"I don't care a particle about seeing you, but my mother will be glad to see her sister."

"Oh, well! Mother can call at your—tenement house, now and then, but it would be better that none of you should call on us."

"Why?"

"Because we wouldn't like to let the servants know that we have such poor relations."

"Do you say this on your own account, or did your father tell you this?" said Mark indignantly.

"I know that is the way he feels."

"I don't believe Aunt Mary feels so."

Just then a boy approached whom Edgar seemed to know.

"Good morning," he said hurriedly. "I have an engagement."

Mark felt that he was dismissed, and kept on his way. He hardly knew whether to be glad or sorry

that his uncle's family was coming to New York. He did not care for Edgar's companionship, nor did he expect to get any of it, but he knew that his mother would like to meet her sister occasionally.

About the middle of the afternoon he found himself riding in a Fifth Avenue stage. The stage was tolerably full. Directly opposite Mark sat an old lady richly dressed, whose means were evidently large. Next to her sat a flashily dressed young man, on whose bosom glittered what might be a valuable diamond stud, conspicuous for its size. He had a diamond ring on his finger, and might easily be mistaken for a banker's son.

All at once Mark noticed some suspicious movements which led him to think that the young man might be quite different from what he appeared. A moment later he saw the young man's hand dive into the old lady's side pocket. Directly afterwards he rose and pulled the strap for the stage to stop. Mark realized that a robbery had taken place. He rose and placed himself between the young man and the door.

"Madam," he said to the old lady, "I think you have been robbed. Feel in your pockets and see.

The old lady, startled, followed Mark's advice.

"My pocketbook is gone!" she said nervously.

"Out of the way, boy!" cried the young man. "I have to get out here."

"Not yet," answered Mark firmly. "Give back the lady's pocketbook."

"Why, you insolent young rascal! What do you mean?"

"I mean just what I say."

"You have insulted me, and I will horsewhip you!" exclaimed the rogue in assumed virtuous indignation.

He seized Mark by the shoulder and was about to thrust him forcibly aside, when a stout, thick-set man rose and ranged himself by Mark's side.

"Young man," he said, "give back the pocketbook as the boy tells you."

"I have no pocketbook."

As he spoke he dexterously dropped it to the floor of the stage.

"Here's your pocketbook, ma'am," said a nurse girl, picking it up.

"Thank you!" responded the old lady, relieved.

"What did I tell you?" exclaimed the dude triumphantly. "Boy, you're too fresh! I am a young man of high family. It is most ridiculous to charge me with stealing."

"I saw you with your hand in the lady's pocket," said Mark calmly.

"It's a lie! But I ought not to be surprised. I know you now. You were sent to the Island last summer for stealing. I remember seeing you on trial at Jefferson Market police court."

Suspicious glances were directed at Mark, for most people are inclined to believe evil of their neighbors—but the stout man only laughed.

"That is too thin, my friend!" he said. "Of course your motive in bringing a charge against this boy is plain.

"Let me out, sir!" stormed the crook.

"Madam, do you wish to bring a charge against this man?"

"No, let him go. I've got my pocketbook back, and that's all I want."

The stout man turned aside, and the adventurer sprang out of the stage and dashed down Thirty-Ninth Street in the direction of Third Avenue.

"I'm very much obliged to you, boy," said the old lady. "Did you really see that young man take my pocketbook?"

"I saw him with his hand in your pocket."

"I'm so sorry. He seemed so nicely dressed, too. I thought he belonged to a rich family.

The stout man laughed.

"My dear madam," he said, "the young men connected with our best families don't dress as flashily

as your late companion. He is probably a professional pickpocket. Did you have much money with you?"

"Over a hundred dollars. I was going down town to pay a bill."

"Then you ought to be much obliged to this boy for detecting the thief."

"I am," said the old lady earnestly. "Here, take this," she continued, and she drew a five-dollar bill from her pocketbook.

Mark hung back.

"No, thank you!" he said. "I don't want any pay for that."

"Give me your name and address, then."

Mark had a business card in his pocket, and wrote his name and address upon it.

"Give me your name and address too," said the gentleman who had proved so valuable an ally. "I may need your services some time."

"I don't think I have another card, sir."

"Then take one of mine."

Mark glanced at the card offered him.

HENRY SWAN.
Watches, Diamonds, Jewelry.
No. 185½ Broadway.

"Were that young man's diamonds bought at your store," asked Mark smiling.

"They were only paste. They might deceive a novice, but I saw through them at once. But I must bid you good morning. I have to make a call at the Fifth Avenue Hotel."

A few blocks farther on the old lady got out.

Mark assisted her to the street.

"You're a very polite boy," she said. "You've done me a great favor. You had better take the five dollars I offered you."

"No, thank you, madam. I will wait till I have a chance to do you another service."

He did not resume his seat in the stage, having an errand on Eighteenth Street. As he was passing Lord & Taylor's store, he heard his name called.

Turning in some surprise he saw Maud Gilbert, the young lady he had escorted to Daly's Theater, leaving the store.

"How do you do, Mark?" she said, extending her hand with a smile.

"Very well, thank you, Miss Gilbert."

"Didn't I see your picture in the *Evening Globe* a short time since?"

"Yes, I believe so," answered Mark, blushing.

"In connection with Mr. Rockwell, the banker?"

"Yes."

"You have become quite a hero. I concluded it was you and I felt quite proud to think I knew you.

Did I tell you that I had a brother about your age?"

"No, Miss Gilbert."

"I have, and he is home on a vacation from Exeter Academy. If you have no engagement on Thursday evening call and I will introduce you."

"I shall be delighted to do so Miss——"

"Maud," suggested the young lady smiling.

"Miss Maud. Thank you for the invitation. I will come."

CHAPTER X.

AN IMPORTANT COMMISSION.

"No. 79!" called the superintendent.

Mark Mason came forward to receive his commission. He had been sitting on a bench with several other telegraph boys, awaiting a call.

"Do you know Henry Swan, jeweler?" asked the superintendent, referring to a paper in his hand.

"Yes, sir; that is, I met him lately in a Fifth Avenue stage."

"He has sent for a telegraph boy, No. 79 preferred."

Mark smiled with pleasure.

"I am glad he remembers me," he said.

"You may go there at once."

Mark put on his cap and went to the jeweler's store. As he entered, Mr. Swan, who was crossing from one side of the store to the other, recognized him.

"You see I haven't forgotten you," he said.

"I am glad of that, sir."

"The boy in my employ has sent word that he is

sick. It is necessary for me to supply his place. In my business fidelity and sharpness are requisite. I knew that you possess these traits, and as I don't want to experiment with a new boy of whom I know nothing, I sent for you."

"I will try to meet your wishes, sir."

"To begin with, have you another suit? I don't want you to wear the uniform of a telegraph boy while you are in my employ."

"Yes, sir. Shall I go home and get it?"

"On the whole, no. I will give you an order on a clothier in Fulton Street for a new suit."

"You are very kind, Mr. Swan," said Mark in astonishment. "I have done nothing to deserve such kindness."

"Not yet," answered the jeweler pleasantly; "but perhaps you may soon. Take this note to Knight Brothers, and you will have no trouble."

This was the note.

"KNIGHT BROTHERS, FULTON STREET:

"Fit out this boy with a nice suit and send the bill to me.

"HENRY SWAN."

Mark lost no time in visiting the clothiers.

"What can I do for you, young man?" asked the salesman.

"This note will explain," said Mark.

The salesman opened and read it.

"It will be all right," he said. "Mr. Swan gets his clothes here, but he has them made to order. Do you want one made to order or ready made?"

"Ready made." I want to put it on to-day."

"Come up-stairs then."

In twenty minutes Mark left the store attired in a nice eighteen dollar suit. He would have selected a cheaper one, but the salesman overruled him.

"Mr. Swan never buys a cheap suit or inferior article," he said. "In the letter he wishes you to have a *nice* suit, and we must follow directions."

"I don't want to abuse his generosity."

"You won't. He is a very liberal man. He is teacher of a class of five poor boys in a mission Sunday-school. Last Christmas he sent them all in here for new suits."

"If that is the case," said Mark, "I shall feel easier."

When he reappeared at the jeweler's Mr. Swan regarded him with critical approval.

"You have made a good selection," he said.

"I hope I didn't go too high for the suit, Mr. Swan. I wanted to order a cheaper one, but the salesman wouldn't let me."

"The salesman was right," said the jeweler smil-

ing. "I am satisfied. And now to your work. I have a request from a lady up town to send her a couple of diamonds rings to select from. She professed to be on her way from Brooklyn and to be in haste. She is, she says, staying at the house of a friend at No. 282 West Forty-Seventh between Seventh and Eighth Avenues. She is to go away tomorrow and would like to make choice of a ring today."

Mark was rather surprised to hear this full account from the jeweler. As he was only to take the part of an errand boy he didn't see the necessity for it. He was soon enlightened.

"Now," proceeded the jeweler, "I am of the opinion that this lady is a clever swindler. I believe she wants to get hold of the rings, and carry them off without paying for them."

"Then you won't send them to her, I suppose."

"I would not if I were absolutely sure that she is a fraud, but this I don't know. She may be a *bona fide* customer, and if so I should like to sell her a ring."

"How can you find out, sir?"

"I hope to do so with your help."

CHAPTER XI.

MR. HAMILTON SCHUYLER IS ASTONISHED.

THE jeweler took from his case two diamond rings. They were large, brilliant, and showy.

"How do you like the appearance of these rings?" he asked.

"They are beautiful!" exclaimed Mark admiringly.

"Don't you think the lady would admire them?"

"I should think so, sir."

"What should you think they are worth?"

"A hundred dollars apiece," guessed Mark.

"If the diamonds were genuine, one would be worth three hundred and fifty dollars and the other four hundred."

"Are they not genuine?" asked Mark in surprise.

"Paste, my boy, paste. The gold, however, is real. Instead of being worth the sum mentioned, one is worth perhaps three dollars and a half, the other four dollars."

"But I shouldn't think it would be worth your while to keep false diamond rings."

"Nor would it if all persons were honest. I never sell them. I only sell genuine jewelry. I will let you understand the use I mean to make of them. These two rings I mean to have you carry to Mrs. Montgomery on Forty-Seventh Street."

"But suppose she takes them for genuine?"

"Then I will make them so. In other words, I will take out the paste diamonds and replace them with real stones. If on the other hand any fraud is intended it won't benefit her much."

"Very well, sir. I think I understand."

"You must to a certain extent exercise your own discretion. I judged from the observations I made the other afternoon that you are a boy who possesses that important quality."

"Thank you for the compliment."

"I will tell you what made me suspect the woman of whom I have spoken. First, the name. She calls herself Mrs. Philip Montgomery. It sounds like a fictitious name. Again, she is a stout, rather common-looking woman, with a florid complexion and larger features. Now Montgomery is an aristocratic name. Again, she says she is from Buffalo. Swindlers generally hail from some distant city. Then again, it is rather suspicious that she should be in such haste.

"The purchase is an important one, and the amount

to be paid—she herself fixed the approximate value—is considerable. You would think she would wish to inspect my stock carefully before making a selection. Instead of this she only asked to have two rings sent up to her of the value of three or four hundred dollars, and she would make choice of one of them."

"It does look rather suspicious, sir."

Mr. Swan gave Mark some further directions, and the latter started up town on the Eighth Avenue horse cars, which he took on the lower side of the Astor House.

"This is new business to me," thought Mark. "I feel an interest to see this Mrs. Montgomery. If she is planning to entrap me, she won't make as much as she anticipates."

Mark had the rings, each in a little morocco case, carefully laid away in the inside pocket of his coat.

When they reached Canal Street, to Mark's surprise, his cousin Edgar entered the car. He did not recognize Mark at first, the latter no longer wearing the messenger's uniform.

"How do you do, Cousin Edgar?" said Mark.

Edgar turned sharply around.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he said. "Please don't call me cousin."

"I am just as much ashamed of the relationship

as you are," responded Mark with a comical smile.

"That is impertinent. Besides it isn't true. Have you been discharged from the telegraph service?"

"No; what makes you think so?"

"Because you are not wearing the uniform."

"I am working for a party that doesn't want me to wear it while in his service."

"Who is it?"

"I don't feel at liberty to tell."

"Oh, just as you like. Isn't that a new suit?"

"Yes."

"Where did you get it?"

"I bought it."

"Business seems to be pretty good with you. How much did it cost?"

"Eighteen dollars."

"Is it paid for?"

"Of course it is."

"I didn't know but you might have bought it in installments."

"I don't have to do that."

"Yet you pretended a little while since that you and your mother had hard work to get along."

"Business is looking up."

Edgar got out at Twenty-Third Street. Mark kept on till he reached Forty-Seventh Street. He

walked toward Seventh Avenue, and finally stood in front of the house in which the customer for the diamond rings was staying. It was a plain three-story residence with nothing peculiar about it. Mark rang the bell, little suspecting what was in store for him.

A boy of about seventeen, shabbily dressed, answered the bell.

"Is Mrs. Montgomery at home?" asked Mark, referring to a card.

"I guess so," answered the boy.

"I should like to see her."

"All right! I'll go up and ask."

The boy left Mark standing in the doorway, and went up-stairs.

He returned in a very short time.

"You're to come up," he said.

Mark followed him up the staircase and into a back room. It was scantily furnished. There was a lounge on one side of the room, and a cabinet bed on the other. These, with three chairs and a bureau, constituted the furniture.

"Just step in here," said the boy, "and I'll call Mrs. Montgomery."

Mark took a seat on the sofa and awaited the arrival of the lady.

He did not have long to wait. The door opened,

but the lady he expected did not appear. Instead, a young man entered whom Mark instantly recognized as the person who had left the Fifth Avenue stage under suspicious circumstances on the day when the old lady was robbed of her pocketbook.

Mark started and wondered if the recognition was mutual. It did not appear to be.

"You're the jeweler's boy, I believe?" said the newcomer languidly.

"I came from Henry Swan."

"Exactly, and you have brought two diamond rings with you?"

"Yes."

"All right! You can show them to me."

Mark's suspicions were aroused and he felt that he had need of all his shrewdness. He was very glad now that the diamonds were paste and the rings of little value.

"Excuse me," he said, "but I was told to deliver the rings to Mrs. Philip Montgomery.

"Yes, that's all right. Mrs. Montgomery is my aunt."

"I should like to see her," persisted Mark.

"Come, boy, you're too fresh. It'll be all the same if you hand the rings to me."

"I don't think so. Isn't Mrs. Montgomery at home?"

"Yes, but she has a severe headache and cannot see you at present."

"Then perhaps I had better call again."

"No you don't. I am a gentleman and won't permit you to insult me."

"What do you want to do?"

"To take the rings up to my aunt. If she likes them, or either of them, she will send you down a check."

Mark reflected a moment. Remembering that the rings were not valuable, he decided to show them.

"Here are the rings!" he said, producing them from his pocket.

The young man opened the small caskets, and his eyes lighted up with satisfaction when he saw the glittering rings.

"What is the price?" he asked, looking up.

"That ring is three hundred and fifty dollars, the other is four hundred."

"Seven hundred and fifty together."

"Yes."

"I will show them to my aunt. Perhaps she may decide to keep both."

"You won't be long?" asked Mark, as the young man left the room.

"No, I'll be back as soon as my aunt descides."

Left alone Mark began to think over the situation. His recognition of his unprincipled acquaintance of the Fifth Avenue stage convinced him that some fraudulent scheme was being carried out. Mrs. Montgomery was probably a confederate of the young man who had just left the room.

"Is he going up-stairs or down?" thought Mark.

He listened, and thought he heard the front door open and shut. It occurred to him to open the door of the chamber and look down-stairs.

He started to do this, but to his surprise found that the door was fastened in some way. He had not heard a key turned in the lock. Possibly there was an outside bolt.

"What object can they have in keeping me a prisoner?" he asked.

Should he ring the bell and summon a servant? If he did so, he would have to leave the house in a state of uncertainty. No! he decided to wait and let further events throw a light on the mystery.

Meanwhile the young man who had possessed himself of the rings left the house, for it was he who had descended the stairs and gone out into the street. He bent his steps to the nearest pawnshop on Eighth Avenue, and taking out one of the boxes, said in a nonchalant voice:

"What will you loan me on this magnificent diamond ring?"

The pawnbroker took the box, and drawing out the ring held it up in the best light. He examined it through a magnifying glass, and a gleam of intelligence flashed in his face.

He returned to the counter, and scrutinizing the young man who had presented it asked in a matter-of-fact tone, "What do you want to borrow on the ring, my friend?"

"Two hundred dollars," answered the customer promptly.

"Humph!" said the pawnbroker with an amused smile, "two hundred dollars is a large sum of money."

"Yes, but the ring cost three hundred and fifty dollars. I am asking a little more than half price."

"So! the ring cost three hundred and fifty dollars! Did you pay that price for it?"

"No, the ring does not belong to me."

"Then to whom does it belong?"

"To my aunt, Mrs. Philip Montgomery."

"I do not know the lady. Does she live in the city?"

"No, she lives in Buffalo."

"And she sent the ring to you?"

"Yes, she sent it to me. She is in want of a little

money, and did not like to ask her husband for it, for he might not be pleased. So she wants to borrow money on this ring which was given her by her brother at the time of her marriage."

"So, so! And your aunt would like me to lend her two hundred dollars on the ring?"

"Yes, sir."

"I think you will have to carry it to some other pawnbroker, my friend!"

"I don't mind taking a little less," said the young man, who was anxious for more than one reason to realize on the ring at once.

"How much now do you call a little less?"

"Well, say a hundred and seventy-five dollars. Probably my aunt will be able to redeem it in a few weeks."

"If I give you a hundred and seventy-five dollars," laughed the pawnbroker, "I think your aunt will let me keep it for good."

"As to that," said the young man impatiently, "I can make no promises. How much will you give on it?"

"I might give you a dollar and a half," answered the pawnbroker composedly.

"A dollar and a half!" exclaimed the young man, clutching at the counter for support. A dollar and a half on this magnificent diamond ring, for which

my aunt paid three hundred and fifty dollars! What do you mean?"

"I mean not to be cheated, my friend. How much do you think this *magnificent* ring is worth?"

"I have told you what it cost."

"My friend, you are very much mistaken. The ring cost only three dollars or three and a half."

"What do you mean?" gasped the visitor, turning pale.

"I mean that it is not diamond, but paste."

"But—it came from a jeweler of great reputation. Surely you have heard of Mr. Henry Swan."

"Yes, I have heard of Mr. Swan. If you will bring him here, and he will say that the diamond is real, I will see if I can't give you more."

"Wait!" said the customer hurriedly, drawing out the other casket. "Look at this ring, and tell me what it is worth."

The pawnbroker took it to the window and examined it attentively.

"That may be worth four dollars," he answered, after a brief pause.

"And is this stone false also?"

"Yes, my friend."

"Then I won't pawn either. Here, give me back both rings."

"Here they are."

"I am afraid you are not a good judge of diamonds. I am sure they are real."

"Go somewhere else, my friend, and satisfy yourself. If you can find any one in my line who will give you five dollars for either, you had better take it and call yourself a fortunate man. Will you leave your name?"

"My name is Hamilton Schuyler, and I live on Second Avenue."

"It is a very good name, my friend. I think you must belong to the Four Hundred."

"I do," answered Schuyler haughtily.

"It is a pity you should have to pawn your aunt's diamonds, and such diamonds!" chuckled the pawnbroker.

But Mr. Schuyler had already left the shop, and was hurrying along the avenue to another of the same class at which he had occasionally had dealings.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. SCHUYLER HAS A BAD TIME.

I SHALL have to stay here till I am let out," thought Mark.

He didn't worry particularly, as he knew that even if the rings were kept they would not involve his employer in any serious loss.

In about half an hour he heard steps ascending the stairs, then he heard a bolt shoved back, and he was not surprised when the young man, whose name he did not know, entered the room. He noted, not without amusement, that his face betrayed dissatisfaction.

"What does your aunt think of the rings?" asked Mark ingenuously.

"Look here, young fellow!" said Schuyler, sitting down and glaring at the messenger, "you've played a pretty trick on me!"

"What kind of a trick?" asked Mark, arching his eyebrows.

"Those rings are not diamond rings."

"What are they, then?" asked Mark in assumed surprise.

"Paste—bogus!" answered Schuyler scornfully.

"Are you sure of that, Mr.——?"

"Schuyler."

"Mr. Schuyler."

"Yes. I took them round to a—jeweler, and had him test them."

"It must be a mistake," murmured Mark.

"It is a very strange mistake, then, for a first-class house to make," rejoined Schuyler in a tone of sarcasm.

"So it is. They must have given me the wrong rings," said Mark innocently.

"My aunt is very much disappointed. She wanted to start this evening for Buffalo."

"I thought she lived in Syracuse."

"She is going to visit her son in Buffalo," explained Schuyler with ready wit.

"I am really sorry. If she would go down to the jeweler's with me, or if you would, the matter could be set right at once."

Mr. Hamilton Schuyler thought over this suggestion, and on the whole regarded it favorably.

"I will go down in about an hour," he said. "You can explain matters to Mr. Swan. Just think if my aunt had taken the rings and paid full price for

them, and not found out till she got to Buffalo that they were not genuine!"

"In that case Mr. Swan would have paid her the money or exchanged the rings."

"I hope so."

"Perhaps you had better hand me back the caskets, and I will carry them back to the store."

Mr. Schuyler returned the boxes to Mark, who opened them to see if the rings were inside.

"You will go down in an hour then?" he said.

"Yes, or—upon second thought you had better come right back with the genuine rings. I have an appointment at the Windsor Hotel, but will be back to receive them."

Mark understood why Schuyler did not care to go to the jeweler's. He could not get possession of the genuine rings without paying for them, whereas, if Mark should bring them, he could carry out his original plan and retain them by stratagem.

Schuyler accompanied Mark to the front door.

"Now hurry down and back," he said. "My aunt is anxious to catch the evening train."

"Very well, Mr. Schuyler."

At this moment Schuyler noted for the first time a familiar look in Mark's face.

"Haven't I seen you before?" he asked abruptly.

"Very likely," said Mark with self-possession. "Perhaps you have been in the store."

"No; my aunt called there, but I did not. You look very much like some boy I saw recently," and Schuyler wrinkled up his forehead in the vain endeavor to place Mark.

"I hope I remind you of a good-looking boy," he said, laughing.

"I see it now. You look like a telegraph boy I recently met in a Fifth Avenue stage."

"I should like to see him, but I shouldn't think you'd remember a common telegraph boy."

"He was impertinent to me, that is why I remember him," frowned Schuyler. "I hope to meet him alone some time. I will give him a lesson he won't be likely to forget."

"Then I'm glad I'm not the boy you mean. Good day!"

"Good day. Hurry back as fast as you can."

When Mark re-entered the jewelry store Mr. Swan advanced to meet him.

"Well," he said, "how did you make out?"

"I've got the rings with me."

"Did you see Mrs. Montgomery?"

"No, but I saw a young man who claimed to be her nephew."

"What did he say about the rings?"

"He left me alone in a back room on the second floor. When I went to the door I found that it was locked. But I didn't trouble myself. I concluded that he had gone out to pawn or sell the rings. He returned in half an hour quite angry, and told me he had ascertained that the diamonds were not genuine."

"Why did you think he went out to pawn or sell them?"

"Because I recognized him."

"You recognized him?"

"Yes, as the young man in the Fifth Avenue stage who robbed an old lady of her wallet."

"The day that we first met?"

"Yes, sir."

The jeweler looked surprised.

"Didn't he recognize you?"

"He asked if we hadn't met before. He said there was something familiar in my face. Finally, he said I reminded him of an impudent telegraph boy he had fallen in with. He wants to meet that telegraph boy alone," added Mark with a smile.

"He has had his wish."

"Yes, but luckily for me he didn't recognize me."

"How did you explain about the rings being false?"

"I said you had probably made a mistake."

"I see you are quick-witted. Well, was that satisfactory?"

"He expects me to bring back the genuine rings this afternoon, as his aunt wants to leave the city this evening."

"I think he will have to wait. Perhaps it may be as well to notify him that she needn't put off her journey on that account. I don't want to spare you to go there again, however."

"There's a boy I know out on the street," suggested Mark. "He would be glad to go."

"Who is it?"

"Tom Trotter, a friend of mine. He's a good boy, though he's only a boot-black."

"Is he reliable?"

"Yes, sir; I will answer for him."

"Very well. Call him in."

Mark went to the door and called "Tom! Tom Trotter!"

Tom looked around and recognized Mark.

"You ain't left de telegraph, have you, Mark?" he said.

"No, but I'm working here for a day or two. Would you like to go up town on an errand?"

"Yes," answered Tom with alacrity. "Will I be paid?"

"Of course. Can't you leave your blacking box somewhere and get your face and hands washed?"

"Yes, Mark; there's a small s'loon near by, where I hang out sometimes. Just wait for me and I'll be back in a jiffy."

Tom reappeared in a very short time with his appearance greatly improved by the application of cold water and soap.

"Mr. Swan," said Mark, smiling, "this is Mr. Thomas Trotter, the young gentleman I spoke to you about."

"Oh, stow that, Mark!" expostulated Tom; "I ain't Mr. Trotter. I'm Tom."

"Mr. Trotter," said the jeweler, smiling, for he had a sense of humor, "I have a letter here which I wish you to take to the address named."

"And to walk, sir."

"No; I will give you ten cents for car fare, and when you return and make your report you shall be paid for doing the errand."

"All right, governor."

Tom started up town, and in due time reached the house on Forty-Seventh Street.

He rang the bell, and the door was opened by the hall boy already referred to.

"Is Mr. Schuyler at home?" asked Tom. "I've got a letter for him."

Mr. Schuyler, who was anxiously awaiting Mark's return, came out of a room to the left of the hall. When he saw Tom he looked disappointed.

I was expecting a boy from Mr. Swan's jewelry store."

"That's where I come from."

"Did you bring the rings?" asked Schuyler eagerly.

"I don't know nothin' about no rings," answered Tom. "I've brought you a letter."

"Give it to me quick."

He opened the letter, and this is what he read with contracted brow.

"MR. HAMILTON SCHUYLER:

"When I called here this morning I recognized you as the young man who stole an old lady's pocket-book in a Fifth Avenue stage not long since. Of course I knew that this was another scheme of yours to get hold of money that did not belong to you. If you had been all right I would myself have brought back the real diamond rings which your aunt wished to buy. Tell her not to put off her journey to Buffalo, as Mr. Swan has made up his mind not to send them."

"Yours as ever,

"A. D. T. 79."

"Then it was the telegraph boy, after all!" ejaculated Schuyler in a rage. "I only wish I had known it. Are you a friend of—the telegraph boy?"

"Am I a friend of Mark Mason? I should smile."

"Step in a minute, then!" said Schuyler, with an assumed friendliness.

As the unsuspecting Tom stepped inside the hall, the young man began to shower blows on his shoulders with a cane that he snatched from the hat rack.

Tom was for a minute dazed. Then his wits returned to him. He lowered his head and butted Schuyler in the stomach with such force that the latter fell over backwards with an ejaculation of pain.

Then Tom darted through the open door, but paused on the steps to say, "With the compliments of Tom Trotter."

Schuyler picked himself up, uttering execrations, and looked for the boy, but he was gone!

"Schuyler fell over backwards with a cry of pain."—Page 98.
Mark Mason's Victory.

CHAPTER XIII.

MARK STARTS ON A JOURNEY.

"SHALL you want me to-morrow, Mr. Swan?" asked Mark, as the clock struck six, and the jeweler prepared to close up.

"Yes; I shall probably want you for a week."

"Very well, sir; I will so report at the office."

The next morning about eight o'clock Mark reported for duty and waited for orders.

The jeweler looked up from a letter he had been reading.

"How would you like to make a journey?" he asked.

"Very much, sir."

"I shall probably send you to Cleveland."

"Is Cleveland in Ohio?" asked Mark, his eyes sparkling.

"Yes." Do you think you can find your way there?"

"I'll try."

"You generally succeed in what you undertake to

do. Well, I will explain. I have a customer living in Euclid Avenue in Cleveland, who used to be a New York society lady. She bought a good deal of jewelry, and always purchased of me. This is what she writes."

The material part of the letter was this:

"I want a diamond pin worth about one thousand dollars. My husband has agreed to give it to me for a birthday present, and left the selection to me. I can't find anything here that I want, and have been led to think of my old jeweler in New York. You know my taste. Select what you think I will like and send me by private messenger. I might of course employ an express, but there have been some express robberies recently, and I am ready to pay the extra expense required by a special messenger. Send at once.

"ARABELLA LORING."

"You see," said the jeweler, "that this is an important matter. The messenger will bear great responsibility on account of the value of what he has in charge."

"Do you think I am old enough for the commission, Mr. Swan?" said Mark modestly.

"It is not so much a matter of age as of shrewd-

ness and reliability. I have been led to think that you possess these qualifications. Of course there would be danger of your being robbed if it were known that you carried such a valuable parcel."

"I am not afraid, sir."

"Of course, again, you must take care not to let it be known what you have in charge. Make what statements you like as to your business. I can safely leave that to your own shrewdness."

"When do you want me to start, Mr. Swan?"

"There is a train this afternoon for Buffalo on the New York Central road. Can you get ready to take that?"

"Yes, sir. May I go home and let my mother know? I am not quite sure whether I have a supply of clean clothes."

"You can buy anything that you need on the way. Have you a gripsack?"

"Yes, sir. My mother has one."

"Will it do?"

"I think so."

"So far so good then. Now about money. I can't tell just how much you will need, but I will give you a certain amount, and if there is any over when you return you can account for it to me."

Mrs. Mason was greatly surprised when Mark came home and inquired for her traveling bag.

"What do you want of it, Mark?" she asked.

"I am going to start for Cleveland this afternoon."

"You're only funning, Mark," said Edith.

"No, I am not. I have agreed to go to Cleve land on business."

"What kind of business, Mark?" asked his mother.

"The gentleman who sends me, Mr. Swan, the the jeweler, has asked me to keep my business secret."

"How long will you be gone?"

"I can't tell, but I will write you. Mr. Swan has told me I may stop over at Niagara Falls, but I shall not be very apt to do so till I am on my return."

"This seems very sudden. I don't know how I shall ever get along without you."

"You have money enough to last you, mother?"

"Yes."

"Then I think there won't be any trouble. If I stay away longer than I anticpate I will send you some more."

"It seems strange that Mr. Swan should send a boy on an important errand."

"The fact of the matter is, mother, that he has confidence in me."

"I am sure he is justified in this, but boys are not usually selected for important missions."

"That is the reason why I feel ambitious to succeed."

"By the way, Mark, Mrs. Mack's nephew called yesterday and tried to get some more money out of his aunt."

"Did you give him any?"

"No. She was very much frightened, but I threatened to call a policeman, and the fellow went off grumbling."

"She won't be safe till he gets into prison again."

On his way back to the jeweler's Mark met his friend Tom Trotter.

"Where are you goin'?"

"Out West."

"Tom's eyes expanded like saucers.

"You ain't jokin'?"

"No."

"When you're goin'?"

"This afternoon."

"Goin' to be gone long?"

"I expect to be back in a week."

"I wish you'd take me with you."

"I'd like to, Tom, but I can't. Traveling costs money."

Tom showed considerable curiosity as to the nature of Mark's business, but on this point the tele-

graph boy was not communicative. He liked Tom as a friend, but did not dare to trust him with so important a secret.

Mr. Swan had already been to a ticket agent and procured a through ticket for Mark.

"Your train starts at four-thirty," said the jeweler. You can engage a sleeping berth at the Grand Central depot. You will travel all night."

"I am sorry for that," said Mark. "I shall miss some of the scenery."

"You can arrange to travel over this part by day on your return."

It was four o'clock when Mark entered the depot. He thought it best to be on time. When the doors were opened he enter the station proper and sought the car containing his berth.

There was an upper and a lower berth, his being the lower. The two were numbered 7 and 8. He had scarcely taken his seat when a gentleman came in and sat down beside him. Neither he nor Mark had noticed each other particularly till the train had left the depot. Then the gentleman exclaimed in surprise, "Mark Mason?"

"Uncle Solon?" exclaimed the messenger in equal surprise.

"What brings you here?"

"A ticket," answered Mark briefly.

"You are in the wrong car. Didn't you know that this is the Limited Western Express?"

"Yes. I know it."

"Where are you going then?"

"I shall stop at Buffalo," answered Mark, not caring to mention his further destination.

Solon Talbot looked amazed.

"What on earth carries you out there?" he asked.

"This train," answered Mark demurely.

Solon Talbot frowned.

"You know what I mean. Why are you going to Buffalo?"

"A little matter of business."

"What business can a boy like you possibly have, I'd like to know?"

"It isn't my own business, Uncle Solon, and so I don't feel at liberty to tell."

"It is very strange. Have you a sleeping berth?"

"Yes."

"What number?"

"No. 7."

"That is the lower berth—just the one I wanted," exclaimed Talbot in vexation. "Mine is the upper. Let me see your sleeping check."

Mark showed it. Solon Talbot regarded it enviously

"I will give you twenty-five cents to exchange," he said.

"I will exchange without the twenty-five cents if you prefer the lower berth."

"I do, but—I would rather pay."

"I can't accept it. Here is the check. Give me yours in return."

Solon did so muttering his thanks rather ungraciously. He hated to be under any obligation to his nephew.

"Where is Edgar?" asked Mark.

"I left him in New York. I am going back to Syracuse to attend to a little business, and shall then return to New York."

Mr. Talbot took out an evening paper and began to read. Mark prepared to look around him. Presently Mr. Talbot arose.

"I am going into the smoking-car to smoke a cigar," he said. "Have an eye on my grip while I am gone."

"All right, uncle."

Hours passed. The two travelers retired to their respective berths. About two o'clock Mark was startled by a severe shock that nearly threw him out of his berth. There was a confused shouting, and Mark heard some one crying,

"What's happened?"

Leaning out of the berth he saw Solon Talbot standing in the aisle, his face pale as a sheet.

There was a swaying movement of the car, and a sudden lurch. The car had gone over an embankment.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TELLTALE MEMORANDUM.

When Mark came to himself he realized that he was lying on his back on the ground. It was a bright moonlight night, and he could see for some distance.

First of all he moved his arms and legs to ascertain whether any of his limbs were broken. Reassured on this point he felt next for the diamond pin. To his great relief it was safe.

All about him was confusion. He was just thinking of getting up when a man came along with a lantern, and stooping over, began to feel in the pockets of a prostrate figure lying near by. Instantly Mark was on the alert, for he felt sure that this man must be a thief intent on robbing the victims of the disaster.

He peered into the face of the robber who fancied himself unobserved, and with a thrill of excitement he recognized the man whom he had met twice before in New York, and who had called himself

Hamilton Schuyler. At the same time, glancing at the upturned face of the recumbent figure he saw that it was his uncle, Solon Talbot, still insensible.

Schuyler had just drawn Mr. Talbot's watch from his pocket, when Mark, putting a whistle to his mouth, blew a sharp note on it.

Schuyler started, let the watch drop, and rose in a state of nervous alarm.

"What was that?" he cried.

"Mr. Hamilton Schuyler," said Mark calmly, "that gentleman will have occasion for his watch. You had better let it alone."

"I was only going to take care of it for him," muttered Schuyler.

"You'd take care of it well," retorted Mark.

"Who are you?" demanded Schuyler, and he stepped over to where Mark lay and peered into his face.

"By jingo, if it isn't the telegraph boy!" he exclaimed. How came you here?"

"By the train."

"Have you any more bogus diamonds about you?" inquired Schuyler sarcastically.

"I might have had if I had expected to meet you."

"I'll see what I can find at any rate."

As he spoke he leaned over and was about to feel

in Mark's pockets when the telegraph messenger blew another blast on his whistle so loud that a relief party came running up in haste.

"What's the matter?" asked the leader.

"The matter is that here is a thief, rifling the pockets of the passengers. He was just feeling in mine."

Schuyler started to run, but was quickly captured.

"What are you about, you scoundrel?" asked his captor.

"Trying to relieve the victims of the disaster," answered Schuyler. "On my honor that is all I was doing."

"Is this true?" asked his captor, turning to Mark.

"Yes; he was trying to relieve us of our valuables. He had that gentleman's watch out of his pocket when I first whistled. As you came up, he was trying to rob me."

"That's enough! Take him along."

Two strong men tied Schuyler's hands together and marched him away.

"I'll get even with you for this, you young rascal!" he exclaimed in a rage, shaking his fist at Mark.

Just then Solon Talbot recovered consciousness.

"Where am I?" he groaned.

"There has been an accident, Uncle Solon," said Mark, now on his feet. "We went over an embankment and were spilled out. Are you all right? Are any of your limbs broken?"

"I—I don't think so, but I have had a shock, and my head is bruised."

"You'll do!" said a surgeon, who was one of the relief party. "You'll be as good as new in a day or two."

"Is there a hotel near by? I want to be moved."

"As soon as we can attend to the matter. We are looking for the bad cases."

"I'll look after you, Uncle Solon," said Mark. "See if you can't get up."

With much ado Mr. Talbot arose, and leaning on Mark's arm left the scene of the disaster. Mark procured a carriage and directed the driver to take them to the nearest hotel.

When they reached it the messenger ordered a room and helped his uncle up to it.

"Just look and see if you've lost anything," he suggested. "I saw a thief trying to relieve you of your watch, but I interrupted him and gave him in charge."

With a look of alarm Solon Talbot examined his pockets, but ascertained to his relief that nothing was missing.

"Can't you stay with me, Mark?" he asked almost imploringly, for the nervous alarm inspired by the accident had made him quite a different man for the time being. "There is another bed in the room, and you can lie there."

"I will stay with you till morning, Uncle Solon, but I shall have to leave you then, as I have business to attend to."

"What kind of business?"

"I don't care to mention it just now. I am traveling for another party."

"I had no idea there would be an accident," said Mr. Talbot. "Good heavens, we might have been in eternity by this time," he added with a shudder.

"I feel very much alive," said Mark, laughing.

"I suppose the accident will be in the New York morning papers."

"So it will. I must telegraph that I am all right, or my mother will be frightened."

"Telegraph for me too," said Solon Talbot.

"All right. Tell me to whom to telegraph, Uncle Solon, and where."

"To Edgar, I think."

Few more words were spoken, as Mark and his uncle were both dead tired. It was eight o'clock when Mark opened his eyes. He dressed himself as

quickly as possible and prepared to go down-stairs. As he was moving toward the door, Mark espied a scrap of paper. It contained what appeared to be a memorandum in his uncle's handwriting.

It was brief, and a single glance revealed its purpose to Mark. It ran thus: "Crane and Lawton told me to-day that their agent writes them from Nevada that the Golden Hope mine is developing great richness. I shouldn't wonder if it would run up to one hundred dollars per share. At this rate the 400 shares I hold will make a small fortune. C. & L. advise holding on for at least six months."

It may be imagined that Mark read this memorandum with interest. He knew very well that the mining stock referred to belonged to his grandfather's estate, but hitherto had been ignorant of the number of shares held by the same. If there were four hundred, and the price ran up to one hundred dollars per share, this would make his mother's share twenty thousand dollars!

This would be a fortune indeed, and it made his blood boil to think that his uncle proposed to cheat her out of it. The munificent sum of twenty-five dollars was all that he had offered for a receipt in full that would give him a title to the whole value of the Golden Hope shares.

Mark turned to the bed.

His uncle was fast asleep. He was not a strong man, and the shock and fatigue of the night previous had quite exhausted him.

"What shall I do with the memorandum?" thought Mark.

He felt that it was not quite the thing to keep a private paper belonging to his uncle, yet under the circumstances, considering that his uncle was deliberately seeking to defraud his mother and himself, he decided that he was justified in doing so. Accordingly he put the memorandum carefully in his pocketbook, and opening the chamber door prepared to go down-stairs.

Just then Solon Talbot opened his eyes.

"Where am I?" he asked, in temporary bewilderment.

"In the Merchants' Hotel," replied Mark. "Don't you remember the accident of last night?"

"Oh, yes," answered Solon shuddering. "Where are you going?"

"Out to telegraph to my mother."

"You have my telegram?"

"Yes."

Mark went out and despatched two telegrams, one to his mother, and the second to Mr. Swan. The latter ran thus: "There has been a railroad accident, but I am all right. Nothing lost."

The last two words were intended to assure the jeweler of the safety of the diamond pin.

Mark ascertained that the next train westward would start at eleven o'clock, and so reported to his uncle.

"I shall go by the next train," he said.

As they went up to the office to pay their bills, the clerk asked Mr. Talbot, "Do you pay for this young man as well as yourself?"

Solon Talbot hesitated and looked confused.

"No," answered Mark promptly, "I pay for myself."

He drew out a ten-dollar bill and tendered it to the clerk.

"You seem to be well provided with money," said his uncle curiously.

"Yes, Uncle Solon, I can pay my way," replied Mark.

"It is very strange," thought Mr. Talbot, "how a common telegraph boy should have so much money."

He did not seem to miss the memorandum. Had he known that it was snugly reposing in Mark's pocketbook he would have felt disturbed.

CHAPTER XV.

A RAILROAD INCIDENT.

MARK pushed on intent upon reaching Cleveland. He decided not to stop off at Niagara till he was on his return. He never for a moment forgot that a great responsibility rested upon him for the safe delivery of the valuable diamond pin intrusted to him by Mr. Swan. When it was safely out of his hands and in those of Mrs. Loring he would feel relieved.

He was within a hundred miles of Cleveland in a car well filled with passengers when his attention was called to a young lady sitting in the seat directly opposite him. She seemed lively and was particularly attractive.

Mark was too young to be deeply impressed by female beauty, but he experienced, like most persons, a greater pleasure in looking at a beautiful than at an ugly object. The young lady had been sitting alone, when a tall man of about forty came up the aisle and paused by her seat.

"Is this seat occupied?" he asked softly.

"No, sir."

"Then I will presume to occupy it."

"He must be a minister," thought Mark.

His clothes were of clerical cut, he wore a white necktie, and on his head was a brown straw hat with wide brim. He folded his hands meekly on his knees, and turned towards his young companion.

"I am sorry to intrude upon you, young lady," Mark heard him say.

"It is no intrusion, sir," answered the girl pleasantly. "I have only paid for one seat, and cannot expect to monopolize two."

"Nevertheless I am sorry if in any way I have intruded upon you. I am, as you may perhaps have inferred from my appearance, a minister."

"I thought you looked like one, sir."

"I am going to make an exchange with a clerical brother."

"Yes, sir," returned the young lady, wondering what interest she could be expected to take in this circumstance.

"I always like to get acquainted with young people. I may perhaps have an opportunity of influencing them for good."

"Just so, sir; but I think such advice is better suited for Sunday, don't you?"

"I am accustomed to drop words of counsel in season, and out of season."

"I would rather listen to them when they are *in* season."

"True! I stand reproved."

The minister took from his pocket a small volume which he opened and began to read.

"This volume," he said, "contains the sermons of the excellent Dr. Hooker. If I had another copy I should be glad to offer it to you."

"Thank you, I don't care to read just at present."

Half an hour passed. The minister put back his book into his pocket, and bowing politely, bade the young lady good morning.

"I am pleased to have made your acquaintance," he said.

"Thank you, sir."

Five minutes later the young lady put her hand into her pocket. She uttered a cry of alarm.

"What is the matter, miss?" asked Mark.

"My purse is gone!" exclaimed the young lady in a state of nervous excitement.

"When did you last see it?" asked the messenger boy.

"About an hour ago. I bought a copy of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE of the train boy, and took out my purse to pay for it."

"An hour ago? You were sitting alone at the time?"

"Yes."

"Did any one sit beside you except the old gentleman who has just left?"

"No."

"You are sure it hasn't fallen on the floor?"

"I will look."

The young lady rose and looked about under the seat, but the lost purse was not found.

"I—I don't see how I could have lost it. I have been sitting here all the time."

An idea flashed upon Mark.

"It must have been taken by the man who just left you," he said.

"But that can't be! He was a minister."

"I know he was dressed as a minister, but I don't believe he was one."

"He looked just like one. Besides he was reading a volume of sermons. I can't believe that he would rob me."

"There was one thing that didn't look very ministerial."

"What was that?"

"His nose. Do you not notice how red it was?"

"Yes, but I thought it might be some humor."

"It was colored by whisky, I think. I know topers in New York who have noses exactly like his.

You may depend upon it that he has your purse. I hope there wasn't much in it."

"Only about five dollars. Generally the loss would not inconvenience me, but as it is—" and she looked anxious.

"If—if I can be of any service," stammered Mark, "I hope you won't mind saying so. I can lend you five dollars."

The young lady looked grateful, but seemed in doubt as to whether she ought to accept the offer.

"I don't know whether I ought to accept such an offer from a young gentleman—" she said hesitating.

"I am a *very* young gentleman," said Mark smiling. "I am only sixteen!"

"That is true, and it does make a difference. Are you sure you can spare the money for a day or two."

"Quite so, Miss—"

"Loring," prompted the young lady.

"Are you related to Mrs. Arabella Loring of Cleveland?"

The young lady looked very much surprised.

"She is my mother," she replied. "But how in the world do you know of her?"

"I will tell you later," answered Mark.

He felt that it wouldn't be wise to mention the commission, or let any one know that he had a diamond ring in charge.

"Are you going directly to Cleveland, Miss Loring?"

"Yes, but about thirty miles this side I have a young niece at a boarding school. She will join me on the train, and will expect me to pay her railroad fare. But for that, the loss of the money would have entailed no inconvenience."

Mark drew from his pocket book a five-dollar bill and passed it to Miss Loring.

"But how can I return this to you?" she asked.

"I will call at your house. I am going to Cleveland also."

"Do so. Here is my card."

She took out a small card and tendered it to Mark. On it was inscribed:

Miss Florence Loring.
No. 1001½ Euclid Avenue.

"Inquire for me when you call!" she said.

"Thank you."

"It seems so strange that you should know my mother," she continued evidently feeling curious.

Mark smiled.

"You will know in time," he said. "If we were alone I would tell you now."

Here there was a stop at some station, and a shabby and dirty-looking man entered the car.

There was but one seat vacant, the one next to Florence Loring.

Mark hastily rose and sat down in it.

"I thought," he said apologetically, "you might prefer me to the man who has just entered the car."

"By all means," she answered with a bright smile. "I prefer you also to the clerical gentleman who rode with me earlier."

"Thank you. When your niece joins you I will vacate the seat in her favor."

Florence Loring was perhaps nineteen, three years older than Mark. She looked upon him quite as a boy, and therefore felt under no constraint.

"Do you come from New York?" she asked.

"Yes."

"You seem young to travel alone."

"I don't think you can be much older than I," said Mark.

"Mercy! I feel ever so much older. I feel old enough to be your aunt."

"I shouldn't mind having you for an aunt," returned Mark.

"On the whole, though, it might prove to be too much of a responsibility. You may be very hard to manage."

"Do you mind my calling you aunt?"

"Well, perhaps it might make me appear too venerable."

"Did you notice, Miss Loring, whether your clerical friend left the cars when he left the seat?"

"No; I didn't feel any particular interest in him, and did not give him a second thought."

"Perhaps he may still be on the train. I have a great mind to go and see."

"I don't think it would do any good. We could not prove that he took my purse."

"If you will excuse me for five minutes I will make a search."

Mark went through the next car and entered the second one, which was a smoking car. He looked about him, and in a seat about the middle of the car he saw the man of whom he was in search. He recognized him by his white tie and his red nose. He was smoking a cigar and gazing out of the car window.

The seat beside him being vacant Mark went forward and sat down in it.

The gentleman with the white tie glanced at him carelessly, but did not appear to think Mark was worthy of attention. He changed his mind when Mark said in a low voice:

"Please give me the purse which you took from a young lady in the second car back."

CHAPTER XVI.

MARK AS A DETECTIVE.

THE adventurer turned swiftly when he heard Mark's startling question. He seemed astounded at the boy's audacity.

"What did you say?" he demanded with hauteur.

"I asked you to return the purse which you took from a young lady in the second car back," repeated Mark calmly.

"Boy," said the false minister, "you must be insane or drunk."

"I don't think I am either," returned Mark.

"What do you mean by such nonsense, then? Are you aware that I am a minister of the gospel?"

"Where do you preach?"

"It is of no consequence," said the other loftily. "I am not in habit of being insulted by whipper-snappers like you."

"Are you in the habit of taking young ladies' purses, Mr. ——"

"Rev. Mr. Buffington is my name, young man."

"Then, Mr. Buffington, will you answer my question?"

"I shall be tempted to forget my sacred profession and throw you out of the car," said the pseudo minister, looking very unclerical as he spoke.

"I have no doubt you would like to do so."

"You ought to be thrashed for your impertinence."

"Suppose you call the conductor and complain of me. You may tell your story and I will tell mine."

This suggestion seemed fair enough, but it did not appear to strike the Rev. Mr. Buffington favorably.

"I do not care to notice the foolish insolence of a half grown boy," and the pseudo clergyman, taking a paper from his lap, half turned away from Mark, and began to read, or appeared to do so.

Mark, however, did not propose to be bluffed off in this manner.

"Mr. Buffington," he said resolutely, "I am a boy, but I know what I am about. You took the young lady's purse. Before you sat down beside her she had it in her pocket. When you left the car it was gone."

"If I ever get you alone," said Buffington in a low tone of concentrated rage.

"If you do, I hope you won't forget your sacred profession."

"I am a minister, but I am also a gentleman, and I shall resent an insult."

"Look here," said Mark, getting out of patience, "either you give me back that purse for the young lady or I will call the conductor and lay the matter before him."

"Rev." Mr. Buffington tried to turn Mark from his purpose by threats, but he was evidently alarmed. He was conscious of guilt, and he knew how such an appeal would end for him.

Mark saw him waver, and followed up his advantage.

"There was only about five dollars in the purse," he said, "and it won't pay you to keep it. If you give it up without further trouble I won't expose you. What do you say?"

Mr. Buffington looked in Mark's resolute face and he saw that he was in serious earnest. He felt that he was in the boy's power, and much as it galled him, he decided that he must yield.

"It is possible, of course, that the young lady in handling the purse, may have dropped it into my pocket," he said. "I will search for it, and if that is the case it shall be returned."

He thrust his hand into his pocket and drew out the purse."

"I wouldn't have believed it," he murmured. "It

is a most extraordinary incident. Is this the young lady's purse?

Mark took it, and opening it, saw that it contained three dollars in bills, and a dollar and seventy-five cents in silver.

"Yes, sir," he said; "this answers the description."

"Give it back to the young lady with my compliments," said Buffington with unabashed assurance. "Express my regrets at the unfortunate mistake. I now remember how it occurred. I saw the purse on the floor where she had doubtless dropped it, and supposing it to be my own put it into my pocket. I was so busily engaged, reading the volume of sermons which I carry with me that it made little impression on my mind."

"I will tell her what you say, Mr. Buffington," said Mark gravely.

Of course he might have expressed doubt of the accuracy of his companion's statement, but he had accomplished his purpose, and did not care to humiliate Buffington farther.

"Good morning, young man," said Buffington with Christian forgetfulness of Mark's errand.

"Good morning, sir."

When Mark had left the car Buffington's face underwent a change. He looked absolutely ferocious.

"To think I should have been trapped and worsted by a kid!" he said to himself. "The boy is about as cool and resolute as any I ever saw. I hope I shall some day have a chance to get even with him."

Mark returned to his own car and paused at Miss Loring's seat.

"Is this your purse?" he asked, holding it up.

"Yes. Oh, where did you get it?"

"From the party who took it."

"Is he on the smoking car still?"

"Yes he is on the smoking car."

"But—didn't he object to surrendering it?"

"He made a decided objection, but I succeeded in convincing him that it was for his interest to do so."

"You are a remarkable boy," said Florence Loring admiringly.

"Thank you, Miss Loring. You will make me vain if you flatter me."

"But I am quite in earnest. I am now able to return the money you so kindly lent me."

"Are you sure you will not need it?"

"Quite sure."

The hours sped fast. Soon they reached the station where Miss Loring expected to see her niece. She went to the door of the car, and from the platform

signaled to a child of eight, who returned the greeting joyfully.

"I was so afraid I should miss you, auntie," said the child.

"I have been on the lookout for you, Gertie. Come in at once."

Of course Mark vacated his seat, and aunt and niece were able to sit together. The messenger boy secured a seat a little nearer the door. He found the journey less interesting now that he was deprived of his fair companion's company.

As they were leaving the train at the Cleveland station, Florence said, "Gertie, this is Mr. Mason, who has been of great service to me during the journey."

Gertie surveyed Mark attentively. She was an irrepressible young lady, given to plain speaking.

"He ain't your beau, is he, Aunt Florence?" she asked.

Florence smiled and blushed.

"No," she answered. "Don't you see he is younger than I am. He is better suited to be your beau."

"I've got a beau already," said the child unexpectedly.

"Indeed! That is news. What's his name?"

"Dan Sillis. He is a nice boy."

"How old is he?"

"About fifteen."

"Isn't that too old for you?"

"Oh no. Husbands always are older than their wives."

Both Mark and Florence laughed.

"Don't you think you could make room for another beau?" asked Mark.

"No; but if I get tired of Dan I won't mind taking you," responded Gertie with the most perfect gravity.

"I will remember that. If we should get married your Aunt Florence would be my aunt too."

"Can I do anything for you, Miss Loring?" Mark asked as they reached the exterior of the depot.

"If you would be kind enough to call a cab."

Mark did so, and the two young ladies entered.

"I suppose you will call if you have business with mother," said Florence.

"Yes; I shall call to-morrow."

Mark was in doubt where to go, knowing nothing of the hotels in Cleveland, but seeing a stage bearing the name "Erie Hotel," decided to go there.

For obvious reasons I have not given the right name of the hotel. This name will answer so far as our story goes.

He sprang in with his valise and in a few minutes

was set down before a comfortable looking hotel of good size.

He entered, and registering his name was assigned to room 96.

"Will you go up-stairs at once, Mr. Mason?" asked the clerk.

"Yes, sir."

Mark followed the hall boy to a room on the third floor.

"Will dinner be ready soon?" he asked.

"It is on the table now, sir."

Mark washed his hands and face, combed his hair, and went down-stairs. He had but one flight to descend, the dining-room being on the second floor.

Even if the dinner had been an indifferent one Mark would have appreciated it, for he was very hungry. When he had satisfied his appetite he had a chance to look around.

What was his surprise when a little farther down the table, on the same side, he recognized his acquaintance of the smoking car, Mr. Buffington!

CHAPTER XVII.

MARK MAKES A CALL ON EUCLID AVENUE.

Mark was not altogether pleased to find that he had not got rid of the railroad adventurer. He recognized him as a dangerous and unprincipled man.

As long as Mark had the diamond pin in his possession, the vicinity of such a fellow meant peril. He decided that he had better lose no time in delivering the pin to Mrs. Loring. He had told Florence that he would call the next day, but really there was no reason why he should not deliver it at once.

About three o'clock he called a cab and directed the driver to drive to No. 1001½ Euclid Avenue. The distance was somewhat more than a mile, and in fifteen minutes he found himself at his destination.

"Shall I wait for you?" asked the hackman.

"No; I may be in the house some time."

He paid for the cab and rang the doorbell.

"Is Mrs. Loring at home?" asked Mark of the servant who answered the bell.

"Yes, sir, but I don't know if she will see you?"

"Tell her that I come from Mr. Swan of New York."

"She will see you," said the servant returning after a short absence.

Mark was ushered into the reception room, and in a few minutes a pleasant-looking woman of middle age entered. She seemed surprised when her glance rested upon Mark.

"Surely you are not Mr. Swan's messenger?" she said.

"Yes, madam."

"And you—have brought the pin?"

"Here it is," said Mark, producing it from his pocket.

Mrs. Loring eagerly opened the casket and uttered an exclamation of delight.

"It is beautiful—just what I wanted," she said.

"Mr. Swan said he thought he knew your taste."

"Did he mention the price?"

"A thousand dollars. Here is the bill."

"I shall not dispute the price, for I have perfect confidence in Mr. Swan. But—isn't it strange that he should have selected so young a messenger?" she continued, regarding Mark with curiosity.

"I agree with you," said Mark, smiling, "but I feel confidence in Mr. Swan's judgment and did not object to come."

"You might have been robbed, if any evil-minded person had known what you carried."

"That is true, but they would not be likely to think a boy would be intrusted with an article of great value."

"That is certainly an important consideration. How long have you been in Mr. Swan's employ?"

"About a week."

"And he trusted you like this?" said the lady in astonishment.

"I am really a telegraph boy. Mr. Swan had known me in that character."

"He certainly paid you a great compliment, and his confidence does not seem to have been misplaced. Shall I pay you for the pin?"

"You can give me a check payable to Mr. Swan, and I will forward it to him by mail."

"I will do so. Can you wait?"

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Loring. I had no business in Cleveland except to deliver this ring."

At that moment Florence Loring entered the room, and to her mother's surprise went up to Mark and offered her hand.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Mason," she said.

"Thank you, Miss Florence."

"Is this call made on me?"

"Partly," answered Mark smiling, "but I had some business with your mother."

"How in the world did you two get acquainted?" asked Mrs. Loring.

"Don't you remember, mama, what I told you about being robbed by a man who sat next to me, and having my purse returned by a boy—a young gentleman."

"I don't mind being called a boy," said Mark. "I shall be one for some time yet."

"Well?"

"Mr. Mason is the one who recovered my purse. Before that he kindly offered to loan me some money. But what possible business can he have with you?"

"See what he has brought me from New York. He comes from Mr. Swan."

"Oh mama, how lovely! Is it a present for me? You know my birthday comes in eight months."

"My dear child, even if it came to-morrow I should hardly pay a thousand dollars for a birthday gift for you."

"A thousand dollars? It seems even more lovely now that I know the price."

"Remain here, Florence, and entertain Mr. Mason while I go to the library and write a check for the purchase money."

"All right, mama! Mr. Mason, why didn't you tell me what business you had with mama?"

"I shouldn't have minded telling you, but if some one else had heard, your clerical friend for instance, I might have been robbed."

"That is true. I hope I shall never see him again."

"Perhaps you may. I have seen him."

"You have seen him?" ejaculated Florence in surprise. "Where?"

"At the dinner table at my hotel."

"Do you think he is staying there?"

"I only know that I saw him at the table."

"At what hotel are you staying?"

"At the Erie Hotel."

"I hope you will be cautious. He may do you an injury," said Florence with flattering earnestness.

"It was because I saw him that I was anxious to deliver the pin as soon as possible."

"But he wouldn't know you had it."

"He would suppose I had some money for traveling expenses."

"True. And now you will have the large check my mother is to give you."

"I shall not keep it in my possession. I shall go back to the hotel at once and inclose it in a letter to Mr. Swan."

"You seem to be a remarkable boy—I mean you are remarkably sharp for your age."

"Telegraph boys have to be sharp."

"So you are a telegraph boy. Are there any telegraph girls?"

"Not that I know of."

"I am afraid we poor girls would be too easily imposed upon."

"Well, have you entertained Mr. Mason?" asked Mrs. Loring re-entering the room.

"I have done my best, mama. What do you think he tells me? That horrid man that stole my purse is staying at his hotel."

"Then I hope you won't send him an invitation to call here."

"He would call fast enough," suggested Mark, "if he knew what a valuable diamond pin you have in the house."

"Then I hope he won't find out. How did it happen, Florence, you didn't watch him when he was sitting beside you?"

"How could you expect me to watch a man who was engaged in reading a volume of sermons. They were the sermons of Rev. Dr. Hooker."

"Perhaps that is where he learned *hooking*," laughed Mark.

"That's a good joke!" said Florence. "By the

way, mama, have you tickets for the theater this evening?"

"Yes, but one won't be used. Louisa Frost can't go."

"Then suppose you give it to Mr. Mason. I am sure he would enjoy the play."

"Well thought of, Florence. Won't you get one of the tickets? You will find them on my bureau, that is if our young friend has no other engagement."

"I have none whatever," said Mark promptly. "You are very kind, Mrs. Loring."

"You must thank Florence. If you were a few years older I should be afraid she had designs upon you. It is leap year, you know."

"Now, mama, what will Mr. Mason think of me? I am propriety personified."

Mark concluded his call and left the house, well pleased at having successfully carried out his instructions. He went back directly to the hotel, and sitting down in the reading room wrote the following letter to his employer:

"HENRY SWAN, ESQ.,

"DEAR SIR: I have delivered the diamond ring, and inclose Mrs. Loring's check for a thousand dollars in payment. She is very much pleased with it, and

says it exactly suits her. I have had a pleasant journey, and expect to start on my return to-morrow.

"Yours respectfully,

"MARK MASON."

As he was writing the address some one passed behind his chair and looked over his shoulder at the superscription.

It was the "Rev." Mr. Buffington, as he called himself.

His eye lighted up as he saw to whom the letter was addressed.

"So this boy is traveling for a New York jeweler," he said to himself. "I am glad to know this. He probably carries a stock of jewelry with him, and if so, I shall cultivate his acquaintance."

He passed out of the reading room without Mark observing him. Mr. Buffington took care to keep out of the way, and Mark supposed he had left the hotel.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A MIDNIGHT VISIT.

MARK was confirmed in his belief that Mr. Buffington had left the hotel, because on looking over the book he found no such name. It did not occur to him that Lawrence Perkins was his railroad friend under another *alias*. Mr. Buffington was rich in names, and had masqueraded under at least a dozen. He, however, had seen Mark's name in the register, and noted carefully the number of his room. The information seemed to him important, especially after he had looked over Mark's shoulder and found that he represented a prominent jeweler in New York.

Mark did not fail to keep his appointment at the theater. He arrived first, but five minutes later Mrs. Loring, Florence and a young man, cousin to the latter, made their appearance.

Florence smiled pleasantly, and arranged the party so that Mark should sit beside her.

"Now, George," she said to her cousin, "make

yourself agreeable to mama, and I will try to entertain Mr. Mason."

"No flirting, Florence," cautioned her cousin.

"Did you ever know me to flirt?" asked Florence in mock indignation.

"Well, occasionally."

"Very well, if I have the reputation I may as well deserve it," and she proceeded to chat with Mark.

In the gallery, among the cheap seats, sat Mr. Buffington, who wanted to while away the evening in a pleasant but economical manner. He did not immediately discover Mark below, but after a time recognized him.

"It is just as well I came here," he reflected, "as the kid won't get to bed till late. Wonder who his friends are. That young lady looks stylish."

Buffington took good care when the play was over to keep out of the way of the throng issuing from the main entrance. He made his way to the hotel by a devious course, and on arriving went up to his room. Mark came in not long after him, and went up to bed at once. He felt quite tired, but was well pleased with his experiences thus far. He had got rid of his responsibility, having delivered the diamond ring, received pay therefor and forwarded the check to his principal in New York.

"Now I can have a comfortable night's rest," he reflected.

He had nearly fifty dollars with him, but this seemed a trifle compared with the diamond pin. Still he considered in what way he could secure this from chance of theft.

There seemed, however, to be very little danger. He had locked the door inside, leaving the key in the lock. There was no door communicating with any other room. After some consideration he decided to hide the wallet containing his money, not under his pillow, but under the sheet at the lower part of the bed where he could feel it with his feet.

"I guess I'll find it safe in the morning," he said to himself.

Now that he was relieved from all anxiety he composed himself to sleep, and in less than ten minutes he was unconscious of all around him.

About an hour later Mr. Buffington in bare feet stood in front of Mark's door. Through the open transom he could hear the boy's peaceful breathing.

"He is fast asleep," he said to himself with satisfaction. "I know how boys sleep, especially when they are tired. I don't think there will be much risk in carrying out my scheme."

He had a skeleton key which would readily have

opened the door had the key not been in the lock on the inside. This fact he soon ascertained.

"It will make it harder for me," he reflected, "but there is the transom. I shall have to make use of that."

Mr. Buffington, to use the name by which we first knew him, had some experience as a gymnast. He drew himself up to a level with the transom, and then with considerable difficulty managed to get through.

The room was partially illuminated with moonlight. First of all, on descending on the other side, he turned the key in the lock so as to afford himself a way of easy escape in case of need.

Though he made some noise in landing Mark was too sound asleep to be aware of it.

"Now where does the boy keep his valuables?" Buffington asked himself.

He searched all Mark's pockets, even to the vest, but without finding anything.

Next he turned his attention to the gripsack, but that proved to contain only wearing apparel. But Mr. Buffington was sharp enough to understand the ways of wary travelers. He went to the bed, and gently slid his hand under the pillow. That is the most common hiding-place for watches and other valuables. But he made no discovery.

Buffington paused to reflect on the situation.

"The kid has certainly got a pocketbook," he soliloquized. "He can't travel without money. Now where is it? That is the question."

He had searched everywhere else. He decided that it must be concealed somewhere about the bed. Finally he made a correct guess.

He approached the bed at the lower end, and raising the covering began to feel about in the neighborhood of Mark's feet. Now, as probably all my young readers know from personal experience, the feet are very sensitive, and there are few who are not "ticklish."

Mark who had been unconscious of the intruder's presence till now speedily became aware that some one was fumbling about his feet. On the impulse of the moment he drew one foot back and extended it suddenly in the act of kicking.

Mr. Buffington withdrew his hand swiftly, and looked anxiously at the sleeper.

Mark's eyes did not open, and the burglar resolved after a suitable pause to continue his investigations. But Mark's slumbers, since the interruption, were not as sound as before. When the visitor continued his manipulations he woke suddenly, and opening his eyes took in the situation. He recognized Mr. Buffington's features and at once was wide awake.

But for the fact that the burglar was dangerously near the money he would have allowed him to keep on. As it was he thought it time to interfere. He gave a vigorous kick, and called out, "Who's there?"

Buffington understood that his scheme was defeated. To rob Mark when he was awake was to run too much risk.

He sprang for the door which he had unlocked, as already noted, and opening it dashed out into the corridor. Mark did not propose to facilitate his flight. He sprang from the bed and called out in a loud tone, "Help! Thieves!"

Now it so happened that the watchman attached to the hotel was just making his rounds and was not far off. He ran to the spot, caught sight of the flying figure of the departing burglar, and caught him by the shoulder.

Buffington was a strong man, and could have got away from a man of ordinary muscles. But the watchman was a man of more than average strength, having served as porter before he had been transferred to the post of watchman and detective.

He gripped Buffington in a vise-like grasp.

"No, my man," he said, "you don't get away so easy. Stand still, and give an account of yourself."

"I am a guest of the hotel," said Buffington sullenly.

"Then why are you not in bed?"

"Because I had a severe headache and thought I would take a little walk in the corridor."

"What made you come into my room?" demanded Mark, who now appeared on the scene.

"I didn't know whose room it was. I thought it was my own."

"How did you get in? The door was locked."

"No, it wasn't," answered Buffington boldly. "You thought you locked it, but you didn't. Trying the knob it opened at once, and I supposed it was my own which I had left unlocked."

"Is that true?" asked the watchman, looking doubtfully at Mark.

"No, it isn't. I took special pains to lock the door, for I knew that there was a possibility of my room being entered."

"Then he must have got through the transom. We have had such cases before."

"If you have finished asking foolish questions I will go back to bed," said Buffington with remarkable assurance.

"Wait a minute. Did you see this man in your room?"

The question was addressed to Mark.

"Yes. I woke up while he was there."

"What was he doing?"

"Searching for my purse. He was fumbling about the bedclothes at the foot of the bed."

"Was your money there?"

"Yes."

Buffington's face contracted with disappointment. He had been on the brink of success, when Mark, unfortunately for him, awoke.

"And you spoke to him?"

"Yes."

"What then?"

"He sprang for the door, and would have escaped if you had not caught him."

"Did you ever see the man before?"

"I saw him on the train coming here for the first time."

"Did anything happen on the train?"

"Yes. He stole a young lady's pocketbook. I made him give it up."

Buffington looked at Mark menacingly. He would have liked to wreak his vengeance upon him.

"Do you know his name?"

"He calls himself *Rev.* Mr. Buffington."

The watchman laughed grimly.

"Sorry to disturb you, reverend sir," he said, "but I shall be obliged to lock you in your room till morning."

Buffington shrugged his shoulders.

"All right!" he said. "I shall at any rate secure a good night's sleep."

The watchman did as he suggested. He shut the burglar in his room, and locked the door from the outside.

"Now," he said to Mark, "you can sleep undisturbed for the balance of the night."

CHAPTER XIX.

AT NIAGARA FALLS.

ALTHOUGH Mark was inclined to pity any man deprived of his liberty, he felt pleased to think that Buffington's career was cut short for a time. There was little doubt that he would be imprisoned for a time more or less extended.

"How much better it would be for him," thought Mark, "if he had earned his living in some honest way!"

Stealing may seem an easy way of obtaining money, but the one who depends on it is likely to be brought up with a round term at last.

When Mark went down in the morning the clerk said to him, "So you had a little excitement in your room last night, the watchman tells me."

"Yes; I had a visitor, but fortunately he was caught without securing anything. He was about to take my pocketbook when I woke up. I was lucky, for I might have found myself unable to pay my bill here."

"We would have given you time. We can tell by your face that you are honest."

"Thank you. Has Buffington been taken from his room yet?"

"Buffington? I don't know any such name."

"That is what he gave me as his name."

"He is down on our books as Lawrence Perkins."

"He seems to have more than one name."

"He may have a dozen. Such gentry usually do. I will send you a couple of policemen and have him taken round to the station-house."

Two policemen were summoned and soon made their appearance. They went up-stairs, preceded by the clerk. He opened the door of the adventurer's room and entered.

"He isn't here!" he exclaimed in surprise, turning to the two officers.

Not here?"

There was no need to ask how Perkins, or Buffington, whichever name he claimed, had escaped. He had made use of the fire-escape and had disappeared.

"He seems to have slept here," remarked one of the policeman, pointing to the bed.

"Yes."

"He must have escaped early this morning."

"I wonder I did not think of the fire-escape."

"He didn't call at the office and pay his bill, I suppose."

"No. He was probably in too great a hurry."

"If you will give us a description of him we can warn the public against him."

"I didn't notice him particularly. I have to deal with so many that I don't scrutinize any one closely, unless there seems to be especial reason for doing so. This boy," pointing to Mark, "saw him on the car, and can describe him to you."

Mark gave what information he could and then went to breakfast.

"I hope I shan't meet him again," he reflected. "I am not anxious to keep up the acquaintance."

About noon he took a train for Niagara Falls, and didn't leave it till he reached Suspension Bridge. He arrived too late to see the cataract, and proceeded at once to a modest hotel in the village where the price charged was two dollars per day.

He might have gone to the International Hotel, and would have been justified in doing so, but he thought it right to be careful of his employer's money. He looked over the book, half expecting to meet the name of Buffington or Perkins, but found neither.

"I hope I have seen my last of him," he said to himself.

He did not feel obliged to take any extra precau-

tions, but slept peacefully and long. After breakfast he started out to see the Falls. He was resolved to see them thoroughly no matter how much time might be required in the process.

"I wish mother were here," he thought. "Some time if I can afford it I will bring her here."

This resolve gave him satisfaction, though there seemed little prospect of his soon being in a condition to carry out his wish.

Mark had no idea of meeting any one whom he knew. He was but a boy, and his acquaintance was limited. Already, however, it included three persons whom he would have been glad to be assured he would never meet again. One of these was Buffington, the other two were Hamilton Schuyler and Jack Minton, the nephew of old Mrs. Mack, who lived in the same tenement house in New York with his mother.

He supposed Jack to be in New York and therefore his surprise may be imagined when he heard a hoarse voice behind him saying, "Well, I'll be blowed, if it isn't the kid! How are you, kid?"

Mark did not suppose that he was referred to, but with natural curiosity he turned to observe the speaker.

He saw Jack Minton, rough and uncouth as when he last met him, advancing to meet him.

"You're about the last bloke as I expected to see here, kid," observed Jack, his face still betraying surprise. "What brought you here?"

"Business," answered Mark briefly.

"They don't send telegraph boys as far as this, do they?"

"Well, not often, but I was sent here, and I came."

"What were you sent for?"

"That is my employer's business, and I don't feel at liberty to tell."

"Oh well, I ain't at all partic'lar to know. But it seems good to meet a friend so far away."

"How long have I been his friend?" thought Mark.

"I say, kid, we'll celebrate on that. Come in and have a drink."

They were passing a saloon, and Minton turned his steps towards it.

"No, thank you, Mr. Minton. I am not thirsty."

"Oh, hang it! Who cares whether you are thirsty or not? You ain't goin' to turn against a friend, are you?"

It was clear that Jack Minton had already satisfied his thirst two or three times, for his face was flushed and his step unsteady.

Mark saw that his refusal would make Minton angry, and he accepted his invitation.

"What will you have, kid?" asked Jack, staggering to the counter.

"A glass of sarsaparilla."

"Oh, don't have sarsaparilla? It's only fit for old women and young children. Take whisky."

"No; it must be sarsaparilla or nothing."

"Just as you say. Barkeeper, give me some whisky straight, and give the kid sarsaparilla if he wants it."

The orders were filled. Jack tossed down a glass of fiery whisky, which made his face even redder than before, and then drawing from his pocket a roll of bills, settled for both drinks.

Mark was surprised at the abundance of money his companion seemed to have. When they met in New York-Jack was very hard up, and had only succeeded in obtaining twenty five-cents from his parsimonious aunt.

After drinking the whisky Jack sank into a chair, finding a sitting position more comfortable under the circumstances.

"Have you seen your aunt lately, Mr. Minton?" Mark asked.

"Who's my aunt?" hiccoughed Jack, "I ain't got no aunt."

"I mean Mrs. Mack, the old lady who lives in St. Mark's place."

"I don't know anything about—'bout Mrs. Mack," answered Minton with a cunning look. "What sh'd I know of Miss—Mrs. Mack?"

"She's your aunt, isn't she?"

"She used to be, but she's a bad old woman. I don't want to see her again."

"She would be very glad to hear that," thought Mark.

"When did you come to Niagara?"

"I d'n'ow, do you? Don't ask me any more of your fool questions," answered Jack with uncontrollable irritation. "Did I pay you for the drinks?" he asked, turning to the barkeeper.

"Yes, you paid me."

"Thought I did—didn't know."

As he spoke, Jack Minton's head fell forward on the table, and he closed his eyes. The last potation was too much for him.

"You'd better take your friend away," said the barkeeper, eying Jack without much favor. "I don't want him to go to sleep here!"

"He's no friend of mine," answered Mark.

"Didn't you come in with him? Didn't he treat you?"

"Yes, but I only accepted because he looked quarrelsome, and I was afraid he might take offense if I refused."

"If I let him stay here I shall charge him extra."

"Do as you like! I never saw him but once before, and I don't care to have anything to do with him. I wish you would let me pay for that sarsaparilla I had. I don't want to feel that he treated me."

"He has paid, and I can't take pay twice."

"Then take the money and return it to him."

Mark without waiting to see if his proposal was accepted put a dime on the counter, and left the saloon. He met a newsboy with copies of a morning Buffalo paper. He bought one, and turning to New York news, his eyes fell upon a paragraph which surprised and excited him.

CHAPTER XX.

A NEWSPAPER PARAGRAPH.

THIS was the paragraph that attracted Mark's attention:

"This morning Mrs. Rachel Mack, an old woman over seventy years of age, living in an upper room at No. 174 St. Mark's Place, was found insensible in her room, as the result of an attack made by some person unknown. When found she seemed very much frightened and was unable to give a coherent account of what had happened.

"From marks upon her throat it was clear that her assailant had nearly strangled her. His intention was obvious. Though living in a poor room amid squalid surroundings, neighbors testified that Mrs. Mack is comparatively rich, being in fact a female miser, and this was doubtless known to her assailant. The old woman testified that she kept one hundred dollars in bills in the bureau drawer. This sum was missing, having evidently been taken by the person who attacked her.

"She was not in a condition to throw much light upon the affair, being dazed and confused. When she recovers from her temporary stupefaction she may be able to give the police a clew that will lead to the arrest of the man who robbed her."

When Mark read this paragraph he decided at once that Jack Minton, Mrs. Mack's nephew, was the old woman's assailant. Jack had evidently left the city by the first outgoing train, considering that at Niagara he would be safe. So indeed he might have been but for the chance that threw Mark and himself together. So it happened that the telegraph boy held in his hand the clew to the mysterious attack. In his hand probably lay the liberty of Minton.

What should he do?

While Mark was not especially fond of the old woman, he felt indignant with her burly nephew for attacking her, and was clearly of the opinion that he ought to be punished. After a little consideration he decided to call at the office of the local police and put the matter in their hands.

He inquired the way to the police office. A pleasant-looking man in the uniform of a sergeant was on duty.

"Well, young man, what can I do for you?" he asked.

"Please read this paragraph, sir, and then I will tell you."

The sergeant read the newspaper notice attentively.

"Well?" he said inquiringly.

"The man who I think committed the assault is in a saloon only a quarter of a mile distant."

"Who is it?"

"A nephew of the old lady."

"But what makes you think he is the guilty party?"

"He has once before visited Mrs. Mack, and tried to extort money from her."

"How do you know this?"

"Because I live in the same house with Mrs. Mack. She occupies the room directly over where my mother and myself live."

"Then you live in New York?"

"Yes, sir."

"How do you happen to be here?"

"I came on business for a New York jeweler."

"What is the name of the party you suspect?"

"Jack Minton."

"Do you know anything of his character or antecedents?"

"He is a criminal. He has been confined at Sing Sing prison for a term of years."

"That alone is a ground of suspicion. Now how do you know he is here?"

"I met him less than an hour since."

"Did you speak to him?"

"Yes."

"State the particulars of your interview."

"He recognized me and invited me into a saloon to take a drink."

"And you accepted?"

"Yes, sir."

"I hardly approve of a boy of your age accepting such an invitation."

"I only drank a glass of sarsaparilla."

"I am glad to hear it. I have a son about your age, and I should be sorry to have him drink whisky."

"There is no danger of my doing that," said Mark quietly. "I have a good mother. For her sake, if not for my own, I would not drink liquor."

"That does you credit. Now as to your information it may prove important. Have you anything to corroborate your suspicion?"

"Yes, sir. Jack Minton seemed to have plenty of money. When he paid the barkeeper for our drinks I saw him pull out a roll of bills. When he was in New York he had no money at all, and succeeded in obtaining only twenty-five cents from his aunt."

"This is an important bit of information. I could order the arrest of Minton, however, on your information without orders from New York. I will telegraph to Inspector Byrnes, and will act in accordance with any orders I may receive from him."

"Shall you need to see me again?"

"Give me your name and address and I will communicate with you if necessary."

"My name is Mark Mason, and I am staying at the International Hotel."

"If convenient, come here in about two hours."

"All right, sir."

Two hours later Mark returned to the police station.

"Oh, here you are!" said the sergeant with a friendly nod. "Well, I have heard from New York."

"Have you, sir?" asked Mark eagerly. "From Inspector Byrnes?"

"Yes."

"What does he say?"

"Here is his telegram."

Mark took it in his hand and read these words:

"Hold the suspected party. Ask the boy to remain. Will send officer by next train.

"BYRNES."

"You see that you are requested to remain. Can you do so?"

"Yes, sir."

"I am glad of it, as your testimony will be important. Now I will send a couple of officers with you to the saloon that you may identify Minton. We don't want to make any mistake."

"All right, sir."

Of course there was a chance that Minton might have left the saloon, or been turned out by the proprietor. But fortunately he was so stupefied that the latter had put him in an inner room, and kept him there till he was in a better condition to move.

By direction of the officers Mark entered the saloon alone.

He did not wish to excite suspicion, and therefore going up to the bar ordered a glass of lemon soda.

While he was drinking it he asked: "Is the man I came in with a little while ago still here?"

"Yes, and I wish you would get him out."

"Where is he?"

"Inside. He has been snoring till my regular customers asked me who I had in there."

"Very well. If you will show me where he is I will get him out for you."

The barkeeper opened a door leading to an inner

room. On a settee lay Jack Minton breathing heavily. His eyes were closed and he was quite unconscious of his position.

"I don't believe you can stir him," said the barkeeper.

"I will call a friend then."

Mark went to the door and beckoned to the two officers.

When they came in the barkeeper looked dismayed.

"Am I in trouble?" he asked.

"No, but we want the man."

"What has he done?"

"Committed a murderous assault on a party in New York."

"Well, he looks as if he were capable of it. You can take him. I shall offer no resistance."

One of the officers went forward and shook Jack Minton vigorously.

"Wha's the matter?" muttered Jack, not opening his eyes.

"Wake up and see."

"I'm sleepy. Le' me alone!" hiccoughed Jack.

"Give a hand here," said the officer, signaling to to his companion.

With no gentle hand they pulled Jack from the settee, and stood him up on his feet.

Then for the first time he opened his eyes, and stupefied as he was, he realized that he was in the hands of policemen.

"Wha's all this?" he muttered. "What have I done?"

"You're wanted in New York."

"New York? Never was there in my life."

"Do you know an old lady named Mack?"

"I—I didn't do it. I tell you I didn't do it. It was somebody else."

Mark and the officers looked at each other significantly. The drunken man had unintentionally given himself away. Just then his glance fell on Mark.

"It's the kid," he said. "What's all this mean, kid?"

"I'll tell you, Mr. Minton. Your aunt, Mrs. Mack, has been attacked and robbed."

"Is she—dead?" asked Jack eagerly.

"No."

"She is my aunt. If she dies I'll get all her money. Take me to a good hotel. I'm sleepy."

It was clear that Jack did not fully realize the situation. Next morning, however, when the two New York officers arrived, he realized it fully, and charged Mark with betraying him. They went to New York in the same train, Jack wearing handcuffs.

CHAPTER XXI.

MARK RETURNS HOME.

"Welcome home, Mark!" exclaimed Mrs. Mason with radiant face as the telegraph boy opened the door of their humble apartment.

"Then you have missed me?" said Mark smiling.

"It has seemed a long time since you went away. Did you have a successful trip?"

"Yes, indeed. Mr. Swan was so well satisfied that he gave me fifteen dollars besides paying the telegraph company for my services. I shall be paid my regular wages by them also."

"Poor Mrs. Mack has been attacked and robbed of a hundred dollars since you went away."

"I read a paragraph about it copied from the New York papers. How is she now?"

"She is confined to her bed. The villain, whoever he was, nearly choked her, and the shock was so great that it quite prostrated her."

"Were you at home when the attack took place?"

"No; I had gone out on an errand. Meanwhile the rascal escaped. I suppose it was her nephew."

"I have brought him back to stand trial."

"*You!*" exclaimed his mother in amazement.

"Yes; I met him at Niagara, and on reading the paragraph I concluded that he was the thief, especially as he seemed to be well provided with money. On my information a telegram was sent to Inspector Byrnes, and he was brought back on the same train with me."

"Go up and tell Mrs. Mack. It will do her good."

Mark went up-stairs with his mother. The old lady, looking unusually feeble, was lying on the bed.

"How do you feel, Mrs. Mack?" asked Mark.

"I'm almost dead," groaned the old woman. "I've been robbed and almost murdered since you went away, Mark."

"Who did it?"

"Who but that rascal Jack Minton, and he my own nephew!"

"Are you sure it was he?"

"Yes, I saw him and talked with him."

"Tell me about it."

"He come in while I was sitting in the rocking chair and asked me for some money. He begged and implored, but I would give him nothing. Then

he began to threaten, and I said I would call you. 'If you do I'll kill the kid,' he said. Then he put his hand around my throat and almost choked me.

"I fainted away, and when I came to he was gone and a hundred dollars was taken from the bureau, all I had to keep me from the poor-house," added the old woman whimpering. "But I'll get even with him. He thinks he'll have the little I have to leave because he is my nephew. He'll find himself mistaken. I'll make a will—I'll——"

"Mrs. Mack, I have something to tell you that will please you."

"Has my money been found?" asked the old woman eagerly.

"Your nephew has been arrested and he is now in the hands of the police."

"Heaven be praised! I don't mind the money now. And where was he found?"

"I found him at Niagara Falls and had him arrested."

"You're a good boy, Mark, and you won't be sorry for helping a poor old woman; no, you won't be sorry. Tell me all about it."

Mark told the story, and it so cheered up the old woman that she got up from her bed and the next day was as well as ever. She no longer complained of her loss of money. Her satisfaction in the ret-

ribution which had overtaken her nephew was so great that it overcame every other feeling.

When the trial came on she even succeeded in getting to the court room where she positively identified Jack Minton as her assailant, and her evidence procured his conviction. He was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment at Sing Sing.

"He'll not trouble me again," said Mrs. Mack triumphantly as she walked out of court leaning on Mark's arm. The prisoner glared at the pair and his hands were clenched.

"If I could only get at 'em I'd kill 'em both!" he muttered, but in his position his threats were futile.

Two days afterwards Mrs. Mason was surprised by another call from Solon Talbot.

He looked about him as he entered the room and his eyes lighted up with satisfaction as he noted the evidences of poverty. Though Mark was now better off no new furniture had been bought. He was waiting till he would feel justified in securing better apartments for his mother.

Mrs. Mason looked surprised when her brother-in-law entered.

"Have you moved into the city yet, Mr. Talbot?" she asked.

"Yes; I arrived yesterday."

"How is Mary? Is she with you?"

"Yes."

"I should like to see her. Where are you located?"

"Why, the fact is, we are not located yet."

"I should be glad to see Mary. It is so long since we have met."

"I can't ask you to call as we are so unsettled. In a short time she will come and call upon you."

"I hope so. It is tantalizing to think she is in the same city, and yet not to meet."

"We all have our duties, and her duty is to her husband and son. I was surprised a few days since to meet Mark on the Central road."

"Yes; he went to Cleveland on business."

"Indeed! has he returned yet?"

"He returned two days since."

"For whom was he traveling?"

"I don't know that it is any secret. He had a business commission from Mr. Swan, a Broadway jeweler."

"He must be a strange business man to select a boy to travel for him."

"He made no mistake in selecting Mark. He professed himself well pleased with him."

"Humph! it may have turned out right in a

single instance. When I select an agent I prefer to employ a man."

"How is Edgar?"

"He is well. I am looking for a position for him. I have hopes of getting him into the office of a prominent broker on Wall Street."

"I shall be glad to hear that he is doing well. He is about the age of Mark."

"True, but their paths will lie apart. My, ahem! position will secure for Edgar an entrance into fashionable society, while your son, though doubtless a deserving boy, must necessarily associate with his equals."

"Mark has some excellent friends," said Mrs. Mason, nettled.

"No doubt, no doubt. I have not a word to say derogatory of him except that he is inclined to be conceited."

"I suppose Edgar is quite free from that fault."

"Well no, perhaps not, but he has a social position to maintain. However, this is not what I came to talk about. You remember that when I was last here I asked your signature to a statement that you had received your rightful portion of your father's estate."

"I remember it."

"I offered you a small sum in consideration of

this release. As the administrator I find it desirable to have it in order that I may render a final account."

"I remember the circumstances."

"I think you made some objection—a foolish one, to which you were instigated probably by your son Mark."

"I remember that too."

"No doubt the boy was honest in his advice, but I need hardly suggest to you how incompetent a boy of his age is as an adviser in a serious business matter. Well, I have come this morning on the same business, but I wish to be liberal. I think it only fair to take your circumstances into consideration. I am ready to give you a hundred dollars if you will sign the paper I have here."

"Let me see the paper, Solon."

Mr. Talbot took from his pocket a folded document which he placed before his sister-in-law.

It ran thus:

"I hereby acknowledge that I have received from Solon Talbot, administrator of the estate of my late father, Elisha Doane, my full share in that estate, and I hereby release him from all further claim on my part to said estate."

"Sign here, if you please," said Solon suavely, "and I will give you the sum promised."

As he spoke he drew from his wallet a roll of ten ten-dollar bills, which he judged would look tempting to a woman of Mrs. Mason's limited means.

"If you will leave this paper here, Solon," said the widow, "I will show it to Mark when he gets home, and ask his advice."

Mr. Talbot frowned and looked vexed.

"Ask advice of a boy of sixteen!" he sneered. "Surely you are better able to judge what is best than he."

"I am not sure about that. At any rate he is interested, and I prefer to wait till I see him."

"Then the offer of a hundred dollars is withdrawn."

"Just as you think best, Solon. I shall not sign without consulting Mark."

"Well, I will leave the paper, then," said Talbot, finding it hard to conceal his chagrin. "I hope for your sake that Mark willl advise you sensibly."

"I think he will. He is young, but he has always shown good judgment."

"Confound the woman!" muttered Talbot, as he left the house. "It is most provoking to have her act in this way. Should she hear of the Golden Hope mine it would be most disastrous. Once let me obtain her release and I can sell it out for my own advantage."

CHAPTER XXII.

A CRAFTY SCHEMER.

"YOUR uncle has been here, Mark," said Mrs. Mason, when Mark reached home.

"I can tell you what business he came about, mother."

"He wanted my signature to a paper acknowledging that I had received my full share of father's estate."

"You didn't give it?" inquired Mark anxiously.

"No; I would not take such an important step without your knowledge."

"I feel much relieved. I have not told you what I found on my journey to Niagara."

"What is it?"

"That Uncle Solon is trying to cheat you out of a large sum of money."

"Is that possible? But father did not leave a fortune."

"So we all supposed. What if I should tell you that he left you enough to make you comfortable for life on your share."

Mrs. Mason looked incredulous.

"Here, read this memorandum, mother," and Mark explained briefly how he came into possession of it.

"Tell me what it all means, Mark. I have a poor head for business."

"It means that grandfather owned four hundred shares of the Golden Hope mine in Colorado, Probably he bought it for a small sum. But it has proved unexpectedly rich, and it will probably soon be worth one hundred dollars a share. That means twenty thousand dollars for you, mother."

"And Solon Talbot wants me to relinquish my claim for a hundred dollars!" exclaimed Mrs. Mason indignantly.

"Exactly so, mother."

"Then I will give him a piece of my mind when he comes here this afternoon."

"Don't do it, mother. It is our policy to make him think we are ignorant of the existence of this important item in grandfather's estate. Only you must steadily refuse to sign a release."

"I will. I hope you will be here when he calls."

"I will get off for the afternoon. I wish to be here myself. I have a little headache, which will give me an excuse."

When Solon Talbot called on his sister-in-law

about three o'clock in the afternoon he was rather disgusted to find Mark at home. He knew that Mark was much more clear-sighted than his mother, and he feared that he would influence her to refuse her signature.

"Good afternoon, Ellen," he said suavely.

"Take a seat, Mr. Talbot," said Mrs. Mason coldly.

"How do you happen to be at home, Mark?" asked Solon, regarding Mark with a slight frown.

"I got excused for the afternoon. I have a headache."

"Perhaps you won't mind going out for a few minutes. I wish to speak to your mother on business."

"Do you wish me to go out, mother?" asked Mark.

"No. Whatever affects you affects me. Besides, I may want your advice."

"I don't ask Edgar for advice," returned Solon Talbot dryly.

"I suppose not. You are a business man, and can judge better than he. I am not a business man."

"You are older than Mark."

"I have always found Mark a safe and good adviser."

"You will spoil him by such flattery."

"I am not afraid of it."

"Very well. I will humor your prejudices. Mark may have more judgment than I give him credit for."

This he said because he saw that it was necessary under the circumstances to propitiate Mark. The telegraph boy understood his uncle's object very well and was amused, but remained outwardly grave.

"Thank you, uncle," he said briefly.

"I will address myself, then, to both of you. You will remember that I offered you a hundred dollars in cash—I have the money with me," he added, tapping his pocket—"if you will sign acknowledgment that you have received your full share of your father's estate. It is a mere form, but I want to wind the whole business up and have it off my hands."

"I can't sign such a paper at present, Solon."

"Why not?"

"Because I am not sure that I have received my full share."

"Don't you believe my assurance to that effect?" said Solon Talbot impatiently.

"It is an important matter, and I have no evidence but your word."

"Do you doubt my word?"

"In this matter your interests and mine might clash."

"Then let me tell you that you are getting more than your share—that is, when I have paid you the hundred dollars. The fact is, your father left a very small estate. After paying his funeral expenses and debts there was scarcely anything over, and off that little you have already had your share. Still I understand your position and sympathize with you in your poverty, and therefore I am willing to strain a point and give you a hundred dollars."

If Mr. Talbot expected his sister-in-law to look grateful he was doomed to disappointment.

"A hundred dollars," he continued, "is a good deal of money, especially in your circumstances. I am sure Mark will agree with me in this."

"It is more than all the money we have," replied Mark.

"Precisely. It will make things easy for you for a year to come. By that time Mark will probably be earning higher pay than at present, and so your mind will be quite at ease."

"You are very considerate, Solon, but I think I would rather not sign."

"Why, this is midsummer madness. I am sure Mark will not advise you to refuse."

"I quite agree with my mother," said Mark.

"Well, returned Talbot angrily, "I have heard of foolish people, but I must own that you two beat the record."

"Why are you so anxious that my mother should sign a release, Uncle Solon," asked Mark quietly.

"Because I wish to have the whole matter settled and off my hands, as I have told you. I have business interests exclusively my own that demand my attention, and I don't want to be bothered by this small matter."

"I have no doubt you have good reasons for wishing mother to sign," said Mark.

"What do you mean?" demanded Solon suspiciously.

"Only that you are a good business man, and understand your own interests."

"I wish I could say the same for you," retorted Solon Talbot sharply.

"Perhaps we do."

"I ought not to be surprised at meeting opposition from a woman and a boy, both ignorant of business. As a rule those who know nothing think they know the most and are most suspicious. However, I can afford to overlook your unexpected obstinacy. I will do what I had no idea of doing when I entered the room. I will increase my offer to a hundred and twenty-five dollars. That is certainly handsome,

"'Here is a pen,' he said. 'You can sign at once.'"—Page 179.
Mark Mason's Victory.

and I shall not let Mrs. Talbot and Edgar know how foolishly I have acted."

As he spoke he laid the paper before Mrs. Mason.

"Here is a fountain pen," he said. "You can sign at once."

"I don't care to sign, Solon."

"Have you been talking to your mother, Mark?" demanded Talbot sharply. "Have you put her up to this?"

"We had a little talk together, but I think she is just as determined on the subject as I am."

"Then," said Solon Talbot, "I can only regard your refusal as an act of hostility. Evidently you want to break with me and mine. It was my intention to invite you both to take dinner at my house to-morrow; but, as matters stand, we cannot receive you, and I shall forbid Mrs. Talbot to call upon you."

"I shall be sorry to be separated from my sister," said Mrs. Mason in a pained tone, "but I cannot sign away my own and my children's rightful inheritance."

"I don't know what you mean by this nonsense. I have offered you more than your share of your rightful inheritance, as you see fit to call it. If you choose to return my kindness with ingratitude, I can only leave you to the consequences of your own folly."

He looked first at Mark and then at his mother to see how this speech affected them, but both looked firm, and there seemed to be nothing to do but to leave them. He took his hat and strode to the door, his hands trembling with nervous anger. But at the door he paused.

"If you come to your senses," he said, "and desire to accept my offer, Mark can call on me. I hate to see you so blind to your own interests."

After he had left the room Mark and his mother looked at each other.

"Uncle Solon seemed very much in earnest," said Mark.

"Yes; I am now ready to believe that he is conspiring to cheat us. It is shameful! He is a rich man already, and we are so poor."

"But we shan't be long, mother."

"You must take good care of that memorandum, Mark."

"I shall carry it to a young lawyer whom I know well, and ask his advice about it. When the right time comes I shall bring it forward. I will ask him to keep it in his safe."

"Very well, Mark. I think that will be wise."

The next day Mark received a letter at the office where he was employed. On the left-hand upper corner was the imprint:

LUTHER ROCKWELL,
Broker and Banker.

"He is going to take you into partnership, 79," said A. D. T. 80.

"If he does I'll make you my office-boy," said Mark in a jocular tone. "I hope the old gentleman has quite recovered from his dynamite scare."

CHAPTER XXIII.

MARK'S GOOD LUCK.

MARK presented himself at Mr. Rockwell's office at eleven o'clock.

The letter which he had received was a simple invitation to call, signed by the banker himself.

"Is Mr. Rockwell in?" he asked.

"Yes," said the clerk smiling pleasantly, for Mark was a favorite in the office.

Mark went over to the open door, and stood on the threshold with his hat in his hand.

The banker looked up.

"Oh, it is my young friend the messenger boy?" he said cordially, holding out his hand.

"I hope you are quite recovered, sir," said Mark respectfully.

"Yes, I believe so. The visit of our dynamite friend was quite a shock to me, and at my age it takes longer to recover from the effects of such an incident than at yours. You must not think that I have forgotten what a service you rendered me."

"I am very glad to have done you a service, sir, but I am afraid I must confess that I was thinking partly of myself."

"I don't think any the less of you for your frankness. Still I am sensible that your promptness and presence of mind saved me from a terrible death—I feel that I ought to do something to show my gratitude."

"You have already repaid me, sir, by your kind words."

"Kind words are well enough, but they are not practical. I should like to take you into my employ but I have no vacancy, and I do not like to discharge any of my old and trusted employees."

"I should not be willing to displace any of them, sir."

"But there may be another way. Are your parents living?"

"My mother is living, and I have a little sister."

"And I suppose they are dependent upon you partly for support."

"Yes, sir."

"Probably you are poor?"

"Yes, sir; our means are very limited."

"So I suppose. What is your name?"

"Mark Mason."

Mr. Rockwell turned to his desk, and opening his

check book, deliberately filled up a check. He tore it off and handed it to Mark.

Mark read it in amazement. It was a check for one thousand dollars, payable to the order of Mark Mason.

"A thousand dollars!" he ejaculated.

"Yes, does it seem to you a large amount? I assure you that I value my life a great deal higher than this sum, so I shall remain your debtor."

"It seems a fortune to me, Mr. Rockwell. How can I thank you for your generous gift?"

"My boy, generosity is a variable quality—I am blessed by fortune, and for me it is a small sum to bestow in return for the heroic act. Would you like to have Mr. Nichols go with you to identify you at the bank?"

"I don't think I should like to draw it all, sir. I should be afraid to have so much money in my possession."

"Then you can leave it with me as a deposit subject to your call. How much of it would you like to draw now?"

"About fifty dollars, sir. I would like to buy a dress for my mother and sister and a new suit for myself."

"Well thought of. Will you call Mr. Nichols?"

The clerk made his appearance.

"My young friend wishes to make a deposit with our house. Let him indorse the check. Then credit him with the entire amount, and he will draw what sum he wishes."

"You are in luck, Mark," said the clerk when Mark accompanied him into the main office. "You are in luck, and I am heartily glad of it."

"Thank you, Mr. Nichols. I feel rich."

"It is a good beginning at any rate. I am ten years older than you probably, but I haven't as much money as you. But I don't envy you, and I won't even ask for a loan."

When Mark left the office and reappeared on Broadway his face was flushed with pleasure, and he walked with the elastic step of one whose spirits are light.

Just as he stepped into the street, he met his cousin Edgar.

"Hello!" said Edgar in a condescending tone. "So it's you, is it?"

"To the best of my knowledge it is, my good cousin."

"Don't call me cousin," said Edgar, hastily.

"I wont," answered Mark promptly. "I am just as much ashamed of the relationship as you are."

"I suppose that is a joke!" responded Edgar haughtily. "If it is, it is a poor one."

"No joke at all!"

"Where have you been?"

"To the office of Mr. Rockwell, my banker."

"*Your* banker!" sneered Edgar. "How long has he been your banker, I should like to know."

"Only since this morning. I have just deposited some money with him."

"Indeed! How much?"

"A thousand dollars."

"You are too funny altogether. If you are ever worth a thousand cents you will be lucky."

"Do you think so?" returned Mark, smiling. "I shouldn't be satisfied with so small a fortune as that."

"My father tells me you and your mother have made him a very poor return for a kind offer he made you yesterday."

"That's a matter of business, Edgar. We didn't look upon it in the same way. But I am afraid I must tear myself away from your company. I shall be expected at the office."

"Go by all means. It wouldn't do for you to be bounced. You might starve if you lost your place."

'I am not very much afraid of that."

"At any rate I ought not to be talking with you. Father does not care to have me associate with you."

"I hope he won't disinherit you. That would be serious for you. If he does, come round to our house, and we will take care of you."

"You are too awfully funny. I think it would be better for you if you were not quite so fresh."

Mark laughed and went on his way.

"Wouldn't Edgar be surprised," he thought, "if he knew how large a sum I had on deposit with Mr. Rockwell? He thought I was joking when I was only telling the truth."

When Mark went home to his supper he said: "Mother, I want you to buy a new dress for yourself and one for Edith."

"There are a good many things we would like, Mark, but you must remember that we are not rich."

"Perhaps not, but I think you can afford new dresses. How much would they cost?"

"The material will cost from ten to twenty dollars. I could make them up myself."

"All right, mother. Here are twenty dollars."

"But, Mark, can you spare that amount? Our rent comes due next week."

"It is the last rent we shall pay here. We will move to better quarters."

"Really, Mark, I am afraid you are forgetting your prudence."

"That is because you don't know how rich I am,

mother. I have a thousand dollars on deposit with my banker, or rather nine hundred and fifty, for I drew fifty dollars this morning."

Mrs. Mason surveyed her son with alarm. A terrible suspicion entered her mind. Was he becoming mentally unbalanced? Mark understood her thoughts and was amused.

"Don't think I am crazy, mother," he said. "The fact is, Mr. Rockwell made me a present of a thousand dollars this morning."

"Is this really true? You are not joking?"

"I was never more serious in my life. He told me that I had saved his life, and he didn't think he was overpaying me in giving me a thousand dollars."

"He was right, but I was afraid few men would have been so generous. So I really have a rich son."

"And I shall have a rich mother when she gets her share of her father's estate."

"Oh, by the way, there is a letter for you. Edith, get Mark's letter."

"I guess it's from a girl, Mark," said his sister, as she handed the messenger boy a dainty epistle in a square envelope.

Mark opened it and read it aloud.

Miss Maud Gilbert asks the favor of Mr. Mark Mason's company at her residence on the evening of Thursday, Sept. 23d.

"An invitation to a party," said Mark flushing with pleasure.

"Where, Mark?"

"At the house of Miss Maud Gilbert."

"Shall you go?"

"Yes, I can go now, for I shall have a nice suit."

"You are getting to be fashionable, Mark. Who knows but you will be counted among the Four Hundred some time?"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE TWO SISTERS MEET.

SOLON TALBOT had two strong desires. One was to acquire wealth. The other was to get into good society.

He had moved to the city of New York with the idea of helping himself in both these particulars. He took a house on an up-town street at a considerable rental. It was really beyond his means, but he felt that he must make a good appearance.

He sent Edgar to a fashionable school where he instructed him to be especially attentive to his wealthier schoolfellows. Though Edgar made himself disagreeable to his poor relations, he flattered and fawned upon the boys who he thought could help him socially, for he, like his father, was ambitious to "get into society."

Thus he contrived to get invited to the party given by Maud Gilbert.

When he had compassed this he was greatly elated.

"Father," he said on his return home, "I am invited to Miss Gilbert's party next Thursday evening."

"Do you mean the Gilberts of West Forty-Fifth Street?"

"Yes."

"I am very much pleased, Edgar. Mr. Gilbert is a wealthy merchant, and stands very high in society. How did you manage it?"

"Through Stanley Rayburn, who knows her brother."

"Have you made the acquaintance of Miss Gilbert?"

"Yes, I met her walking with Stanley on Fifth Avenue. He introduced me."

"I should hardly think she would have invited you on such short acquaintance."

"I got Stanley to make a personal request of her. She objected at first, but finally came round. Stanley says she is very good-natured and obliging."

"Luckily for you. Well, I am glad you have the invitation. It will be an entering wedge. You must try to get acquainted with as many of her guests as possible."

"Trust me for that, father. I know on which side my bread is buttered."

"I know you are sensible. You quite accord with

me in your views on this subject. As for your mother she has no proper pride. She would be contented to associate with persons in the same social position as Mrs. Mason and Mark. This very morning she applied to me for permission to call upon her sister."

"Of course you refused."

"Of course. Not but I would consent if your aunt, instigated by Mark, had not acted in such an extraordinary way about signing a release to me as administrator to your grandfather's estate."

"What is her reason?"

"I suppose she thinks she ought to have more than she has received from it."

"Grandfather was very poor, wasn't he?"

"I didn't think so when he lived, but he left next to nothing after his debts were paid."

"Some people are very unreasonable."

"Of course. I suppose Mrs. Mason and Mark think I ought to make up for their disappointment."

"But you won't, father?"

"Certainly not. I did offer them a hundred dollars out of pity for their poverty, but they are standing out for more."

"It is quite disgusting."

"It is human nature, I suppose," said Mr. Tal-

bot leniently. "I don't know that I am surprised."

Mrs. Talbot was very unlike her husband and son. She was sincerely attached to her sister, and her affection had not been diminished by Mrs. Mason's poverty.

It was her desire to call on her as soon as she arrived in the city, but she stood somewhat in awe of her husband who had positively refused his consent. So she unwillingly gave up the plan for the present, hoping that the time would soon come when she and her sister could meet.

It came two days before the party.

With the money with which Mark supplied her, Mrs. Mason went up town to the well-known store of Arnold & Constable, intending to get dress patterns there.

She had made her purchases and received her bundle.

"Will you have it sent home?" asked the salesman courteously.

"No, thank you."

Mrs. Mason shrank from having the parcel brought to her humble abode in St. Mark's Place.

She was turning to go when she heard her name called in glad and familiar accents.

"Why, Ellen, do I meet you at last?"

"Lucy!" exclaimed Mrs. Mason, as she clasped hands warmly with her sister. "This is a delightful surprise."

"To me also; I thought I should never see you again."

"It is not my fault, Lucy."

"No, no. I know it," answered Mrs. Talbot. "Mr. Talbot is peculiar, as you know. He thinks everything of social rank. Now tell me, how are you getting on?"

"Very poorly till lately, but now better."

"You are not in want? Solon doesn't allow me much money, but——"

"No, Lucy. I want for nothing. Mark is a good boy, and he has been fortunate. You see I have just bought two dress patterns, one for Edith, the other for myself."

"I am glad indeed to hear it. Mark is a telegraph messenger, is he not?"

"Yes."

"I shouldn't think that would pay very well."

"It does not, so far as wages go, but some who have employed him have been liberal."

"Come out with me for a walk. My purchases can wait. We will go to Sixth Avenue, as we are less likely to be seen together than on Broadway."

For an hour the two sisters talked, and it seemed delightful to both to be again together.

"I must go home now," said Mrs. Mason, "as I left Edith alone. Besides it is time for me to prepare supper for Mark. I wish you could go with me."

"I would, Ellen, but Mr. Talbot would be angry."

"Do you think he is justified in keeping you away from your only sister?"

"No, but, Ellen I am ready to make a sacrifice for a quiet life."

"Can't we meet again?"

"Yes; I will go to Arnold & Constable's next week on the same day and at the same hour. I wish I could invite you to my house, but you know how matters stand."

"Yes I know. Mr. Talbot appears to have increased his property."

"Yes, I judge so, though I receive no larger allowance. But he tells me very little of his affairs. He is more confidential with Edgar than myself."

"I have seen Edgar. He came to my rooms with his father some time since. He is about the age of Mark."

"Yes; there is not over a month's difference between them."

"If Mr. Talbot was different they would be company for each other. I believe Mark meets Edgar occasionally in the street. I hope Edgar is a comfort to you."

"He is my son, and of course I love him; but, Ellen; I fear his father is not exercising a good influence upon him. He is making him proud and arrogant. I would not mention this except to you."

At this moment Mark, going up-town on an errand in a Sixth Avenue car, saw his mother and his aunt together on the sidewalk. He instantly left the car and joined them.

"How do you do, Aunt Lucy?" he said, his face lighting up.

"And this is Mark!" said Mrs. Talbot equally pleased. "How you have grown and how well you look!"

"Thank you, aunt. I am tall enough to look over my mother's head."

"As Edgar is taller than I. Your mother tells me you meet Edgar sometimes."

"Yes, Aunt Lucy," returned Mark smiling, "but he doesn't care to be very intimate with his poor relations."

Mrs. Talbot looked grave.

"You won't suspect me of the same feeling, Mark?" she said.

"No; you are too much like mother."

"I am glad to hear that you are doing well."

"Yes; I have been fortunate."

"I wish you were in a better position. Perhaps Mr. Talbot might interest himself to get you a better place."

"No, aunt, don't ask him. I have other friends who will help me when I wish to make a change. For the present I am content to remain as I am."

Mark excused himself and boarded the next car, as he did not wish to lose any time.

The sisters separated and Mrs. Mason went home feeling cheered by her unexpected interview with Mrs. Talbot.

When she returned to her humble home Edith said, "Mrs. Mack wants to see you. I think she is very sick. A gentleman came to see her, but I don't know whether it was a doctor."

Mrs. Mason went up stairs immediately.

The old lady was lying on the bed, looking fatigued.

"How do you do, Mrs. Mack?" said Mrs. Mason kindly.

"I feel tired, but I am strong—oh, yes, I am very strong. I think I shall live ten years," and the old woman peered anxiously into Mrs. Mason's face hoping for a confirmation of her opinion.

"I hope you will if you desire it. Edith tells me you have had a visit from the doctor."

"No, it was not the doctor; it was a lawyer. I have made my will."

Mrs. Mason looked surprised.

"Not that I have much to leave, but I don't want my nephew to get anything. If anything happens to me—some years hence—I would like you to call on my lawyer and tell him. He has an office at 132 Nassau Street. Mr. Page. You will remember?"

"Yes."

"He has my will I didn't want to leave it here. It might be stolen, or mislaid, and then Jack Minton would inherit. You'll put down the address?"

"I will do it at once."

"That is all. I think I will sleep now."

"I wonder who will inherit the old lady's money," thought Mrs. Mason. "Very probably she has left it to some charitable society. I know of no other relation except Jack Minton."

CHAPTER XXV.

MAUD GILBERT'S PARTY.

Edgar Talbot looked forward with eager anticipation to the evening of Maud Gilbert's party. It was to be his introduction into New York society.

He flattered himself that his appearance would win him favor. Though far from handsome, he thought himself so—a delusion not uncommon among boys and men. He dressed himself very carefully, and at the proper time set out for the house where the party was to be held. He and Stanley Rayburn had agreed to go together.

On reaching the house they were directed to the room set apart for gentlemen to arrange their toilet and leave their coats. The mansion was brilliantly decorated, and as Edgar went up-stairs he felt a thrill of exultation at being a guest in such a house.

He inwardly resolved that he would take advantage of his slight acquaintance with the Gilberts and push himself into intimate friendship. In that way he would be in a position to extend his acquaintance among fashionable people.

But a surprise and a shock were in store for him. As he entered the room he saw a boy standing in front of the mirror brushing his hair. He started in surprise.

The figure looked familiar. Could it be! Yes, it was his cousin Mark Mason—Mark Mason, handsomely dressed in party costume, and with a rose in his button-hole.

Mark turned round to see who were the newcomers.

"Good evening, Edgar," said Mark.

"*You* here!" exclaimed Edgar, in unqualified amazement.

"Yes; I did not expect to have the pleasure of meeting you," answered Mark with an amused smile. He understood Edgar's surprise, and the reason of it.

Meanwhile Stanley Rayburn stood by in silence.

"Introduce me to your friend, Edgar," he said, for he was attracted by Mark's frank, handsome face.

"Mark Mason—Stanley Rayburn!" said Edgar awkwardly. He would have liked to decline introducing Stanley to his poor cousin, but there seemed to be no way of avoiding it.

"I am glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Mason," said Stanley cordially.

"Thank you, but don't call me Mr. Mason."

"I would rather say Mark. Any friend of Edgar——"

"Mark Mason and I are only acquaintances," said Edgar hurriedly, and in the worst possible taste.

"I hope that *we* shall be friends," said Stanley with emphasis, thinking that Edgar was a cad.

"I hope so too," rejoined Mark earnestly, "if, after getting my 'character' from Edgar," he added with a smile, "you still wish it."

Stanley was a little puzzled, not knowing how Mark was regarded by his companion.

"I think I shall go down at once," said Stanley. "I don't think I require any finishing touches to my toilet."

"Be ready to go with me to Miss Gilbert," said Edgar. "I will follow you in a minute."

"Very well."

"Now," said Edgar, when he and his cousin were alone, "how do you happen to be here?"

"By Miss Gilbert's invitation, of course. I suppose that is the case with you."

"Certainly. Does she know that you are a telegraph boy?"

"Yes."

"That's strange. Did you ever meet her?"

"Oh, yes; I have spent the evening here two or three times."

"That's queer. By the way, you seem to be very nicely dressed."

"I am glad you like my suit."

"Yet you are as poor as poverty. It was a crazy idea to run into debt for an expensive suit."

"I didn't run into debt. My suit is paid for."

"Yet your mother claims to be very poor."

"We are getting along better now."

"It would have been wiser for you to save the money you spent on this suit and keep it for rent and food."

"Your advice is very kind, Edgar, but I really feel that I can manage my own business."

"Oh, well, if you choose to resent my good advice——"

"I don't. I hope it springs from your interest in me."

During this conversation Edgar was brushing his hair carefully and "prinking" before the glass, for he was anxious to appear as fascinating as possible when he presented himself to Miss Gilbert.

"Shall we go down?" asked Mark.

"Yes, perhaps we may as well. I suppose you would feel awkward entering the drawing-room alone."

"Perhaps so," said Mark smiling.

As the two presented themselves in the room below Edgar looked about for Stanley, but did not see him.

"I wonder where Stanley has disappeared to," he said in a tone of vexation. "He promised to go up with me to Miss Gilbert."

"If he doesn't show up, Edgar, I shall be glad to take his place. As you have only recently come to the city, I suppose you don't know her well."

"I only met her once," Edgar admitted, "and she may not remember me."

"Then come with me."

Almost against his wishes Edgar found himself walking up to the other end of the room with his despised cousin. He would not have believed it possible if this had been predicted to him an hour earlier.

"Good evening, Mark! I am glad to see you here," said Maud Gilbert, with a pleasant smile.

"Let me present Mr. Edgar Talbot," said Mark after a suitable acknowledgment.

"I had the pleasure of meeting you when in compay with Stanley Rayburn," explained Edgar.

"Oh, yes, I remember. And so you are also acquainted with Mark."

"Yes," answered Edgar, rather awkwardly. "I expected Mr. Rayburn to present me."

"You have found a sponsor equally good," returned Maud.

Then the two walked on, giving place to others.

"You seem to know Miss Gilbert very well," said Edgar in a tone of curiosity.

"Yes."

"It is strange. I don't understand it."

Edgar was relieved to find that Mark did not claim him as a cousin, though to his surprise he saw that Mark stood particularly well with the young hostess.

"How do you, Mark?" The speaker was a bright boy of sixteen, the brother of Miss Gilbert. "How well you are looking!"

"Thank you, Charlie. If a young lady had told me that it would make me proud."

"Come along. I will introduce you to a couple of nice girls."

"Who is that?" asked Edgar of Rayburn, who had now come up.

"Don't you know? That is Charlie Gilbert, Maud's brother."

"So he knows Mark, too."

"Why shouldn't he?"

"Because Mark is—you will be surprised to hear it—a common telegraph boy."

"He may be a telegraph boy, but he certainly is not a common one. He is a nice-looking fellow, and I am glad to know him."

Presently dancing began. In his earlier days, when his father was living, Mark had taken lessons from a teacher, and though he was rather out of practise he ventured to go out on the floor, having as his partner one of the prettiest girls in the room.

As there was space for but two sets of dancers, Edgar was obliged to sit still and see the others dance. He felt very much dissatisfied especially as Mark seemed to be enjoying himself thoroughly.

"Society in New York seems to be very much mixed," he said to himself, "when telegraph boys can push in and make themselves so conspicuous in rich men's houses."

Edgar got a chance to dance once later on, but the girl he danced with was very small and insignificant in appearance.

"Well, what kind of a time did you have?" asked Solon Talbot when his son returned home.

"Very good."

"I suppose it was quite a brilliant affair," said Solon Talbot complacently. "I am glad to have you invited to such a swell house. Did Stanley Rayburn take you up to Miss Gilbert?"

"No; he promised to, but when I looked for him he was not to be found."

"That was awkward."

"No; I found a substitute, a boy whom you and I both know."

"I have no idea whom you can mean."

"No; you might guess all night, but without success. It was Mark Mason."

"What! You don't mean to say that Mark Mason was a guest at the party?"

"Yes he was, and he seemed very well acquainted too."

"Was he in his telegraph uniform?"

"No; he had on a nice new suit, as handsome as mine. He had a rose in his button-hole and looked quite like a dude."

"How very extraordinary!" ejaculated Solon.

"I thought you would say so."

"Why, they are living from hand to mouth, steeped in poverty."

"So I thought, but it doesn't seem like it."

"The boy must be very cheeky, but even so, I can't account for his success. I shall have to call on his mother and ask what it means."

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN IMPORTANT COMMISSION.

A WEEK later Mark received the follow letter:

"Mark Mason: Please call at my office as soon as convenient.

"D. GILBERT."

"This letter is from Maud Gilbert's father," said Mark, addressing his mother. "I wonder what he wants."

"Nothing disagreeable, I am sure. Of course you will go."

"I will call to-morrow morning."

Mr. Gilbert was a commission merchant, with an office in the lower part of the city, west of Broadway. Mark obtained leave of absence for an hour agreeing to pay the price usually charged to customers.

He had seen Mr. Gilbert, a stout, portly man of fifty, during his call at the house in Forty-Fifth Street. Therefore when he was admitted to Mr. Gilbert's office, he addressed him not as a stranger but as an old acquaintance.

"I received your note, Mr. Gilbert, and have called according to your request."

"That is right, Mark. Sit down till I have finished looking over my letters. You will find the morning *Herald* on the table near you."

In ten minutes the merchant had finished with his letters, and whirled round in his chair.

"I believe you are a telegraph boy," he said.

"Yes, sir."

"What pay do you receive?"

"I don't average over six dollars a week."

"How old are you?"

"Sixteen."

"My daughter thinks you are unusually bright and intelligent."

"I am very much obliged to Miss Maud for her good opinion," said Mark, his face flushing with gratification.

"How can you get along on six dollars a week? You have a mother partially dependent upon you, I believe."

"I have lately had a present of a thousand dollars from Mr. Luther Rockwell, the banker. I was in his office when a dynamite crank threatened to blow us all up."

"I heartily congratulate you, Mark. You deserved the gift for your coolness and courage, but it

isn't every rich man who would make so generous an acknowledgment for your services."

"That's true, sir. Mr. Rockwell has been very kind."

"How do you like the position of telegraph boy?"

"I would like to give it up. It doesn't lead to anything. But I don't want to throw myself out of work. Six dollars a week is a small income, but it is better than nothing."

"I approve your prudence, but I think other and better employment can be obtained for you. Maud tells me that you were sent not long since to Cleveland with some valuable jewelry."

"Yes, sir."

"You succeeded in your mission?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you meet with any adventures while you were gone?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tell me briefly what they were."

Mark did so.

"Don't think I am influenced by curiosity," said Mr. Gilbert. "The fact is, I have a still longer journey for you if you don't object, and I wished to assure myself that you were adequate to undertake it. It may take six weeks, or it may take two

months. I should advise you to give up your position as messenger, and I will guarantee you an equally good place when you return."

"Thank you, sir. In that case I won't hesitate to give it up."

"Your week closes to-morrow, I suppose."

"Yes, sir."

"Then give notice at once."

"Where are you going to send me, sir?" asked Mark, with pardonable curiosity.

"To California.

Mark looked amazed. He knew that California was even further away than Liverpool, and having the love of travel and adventure natural to boys of his age he felt that he should thoroughly enjoy the trip.

"I should like very much to go," he said promptly.

"Now I must tell you why I send you. A cousin of mine has just died in California, leaving a young son of ten years of age. He wrote me a letter from his death-bed commending the boy to my care. I will gladly undertake the charge of the boy, as I had a strong regard for his father, who, by the way had died poor.

"But a difficulty presented itself. The boy could not come East by himself, and there seemed no one to bring him. Of course I can't leave my business,

and there is no one else in my family who can be sent. Under these circumstances Maud has recommended me to send you."

"I shall be glad to go, sir."

"You are a rather young guardian for a young boy, but I think you possess the necessary qualification. Your experience as a telegraph boy has made you sharp and self-reliant, and altogether I think you will acquit yourself to my satisfaction."

"I will try to, sir."

"I need no assurance of that."

"How am I to go?"

"By the Union and Central Pacific Road from Omaha. I will supply you with a through ticket."

"Shall you wish me to return immediately?"

"No; you can stay in California two or three weeks and get acquainted with the boy. I have never seen him, but I think you won't find him troublesome. Are you fond of children?"

"Very, sir."

"The poor boy will need a kind friend, having lost his father so recently. And now, there is one thing more to be spoken of—your compensation."

"I shall be satisfied with whatever you think right."

"Then we will fix that after your return. But

you will need to leave some money with your mother to pay expenses while you are away."

"I can draw from Mr. Rockwell."

"No; if you have money in his hands let it remain. I will advance you a hundred dollars to leave with your mother. I may as well do that now. On Saturday evening, when you are released from your present position, call at the house and receive your ticket and final instructions."

"Thank you, sir."

Mr. Gilbert rang a little bell, and a boy appeared.

"Go to the bank and get this check cashed," said the merchant.

In a few minutes he returned with a roll of bills.

"Count them over and see if they are right, Mark."

"Yes, sir; they are correct."

"Very good! Remember that they are for your mother. Tell her also that if you remain longer than I anticipate, and she gets short of money, she can call at my office and I will supply her with more."

Mark left the office in a state of joyful excitement.

He was to make a long journey across the continent. He would see many states and cities, and

become acquainted with places which he now knew only by hearsay. And after he returned his prospects would be brighter, for Mr. Gilbert had promised to find him a position at least equal to the one he resigned.

In the afternoon as Mark was returning from an errand in West Fiftieth Street, he saw Edgar Talbot in the neighborhood of Bryant Park.

"Hallo!" said Edgar condescendingly. "Are you on an errand?"

"Yes."

"Ho, ho! how you will look in a telegraph boy's uniform when you are a young man of twenty-five."

"What makes you think I am going to be a telegraph boy so long?"

"Because you are not fit for any other business."

Mark smiled.

"I am sorry for that," he said, "for as it happens I have tendered my resignation."

"You don't mean that you are going to leave the messenger service?"

"Yes."

"But how are you going to live? It won't be any use to ask father for money."

"I presume not."

"Perhaps," suggested Edgar hopefully, "you have been discharged."

"I discharged myself."

"Have you got another position?"

"I am going to travel for a while."

Edgar Talbot was more and more perplexed. In fact he had always found Mark a perplexing problem.

"How can you travel without money?"

"Give it up. I don't propose to."

"Have you got any money?"

Mark happened to have with him the roll of bills given him for his mother. He drew it out.

"Do you mean to say that is yours? How much is there?"

"A hundred dollars."

"I don't believe it is yours."

"It isn't. It belongs to my mother."

"But father said she was very poor."

"At any rate this money belongs to her."

"Where are you going to travel?"

"Out West."

This was all the information Mark would give. Edgar reported the conversation to his father, who was also perplexed.

"Mark Mason is a strange boy," he said. "I don't understand him."

CHAPTER XXVII.

LAST INSTRUCTIONS.

MARK had intended to find a new and more comfortable place for his mother, being dissatisfied with their humble rooms in St. Mark's Place, but the journey he was called upon so unexpectedly to make, led to a postponement of this plan.

"You can move, mother, if you like," said Mark, after placing the hundred dollars in her hands. "You'll have money enough."

"That's true, Mark, but you wouldn't know how to address me, and I might lose some of your letters. I shall be satisfied to stay here till you return. But do you think you had better go? You are very young to cross the continent alone."

"I am nearly sixteen, mother, and I have been in the habit of looking out for myself. Besides Mr. Gilbert thinks I am old enough, and if he has confidence in me I ought to have confidence in myself."

"I suppose it is all right, but I shall miss you terribly."

"It is for my good, and will be for yours, mother. I have long wanted to leave the messenger service

and get into some steady position where I can push myself ahead, and this seems to me my chance."

"You will write often, Mark?"

"I will be sure to do that. You don't think I will forget my mother?"

On Saturday evening Mark went to Mr. Gilbert's to receive instructions.

"I must tell you something about the boy of whom you are to be temporary guardian," said Mr. Gilbert. "Perhaps it will be best for me to read you in the first place the letter I received from my poor cousin just before his death. It was written at his dictation, for he was already too weak to hold the pen."

He drew from a desk this letter which he proceeded to read aloud:

"GULCHVILLE, CALIFORNIA,
"Oct. 17.

"MY DEAR COUSIN,

"When this letter reaches you I shall in all probability be in a better world. I am dying of consumption. I leave behind me a boy of ten—my poor little Philip. I leave him to the mercies of a cold world, for I am penniless. I had a little property once, but I speculated and lost all. Poor Philip will be an orphan and destitute. I know you are rich and prosperous. Won't you, in your gen-

erosity, agree to care for my poor boy? He won't require much, and I shall be content to have him reared plainly, but I don't want him to suffer.

I am sick at the house of a cousin of my wife. He is a mean man, and his wife is also penurious and mean. They have made my sickness still more bitter by their taunts. They complain that I am an expense to them, and they would turn me out of doors, sick as I am, I am convinced, if they were not ashamed to do so. Poor Philip will be left to their tender mercies, but I hope only for a short time. I can bear to suffer myself, but I can't bear to think of his suffering. He is a sensitive boy, not over strong, and ill-fitted to bear the buffetings of a cold and unkind world. Won't you send for him as soon as you can? In your hands I am sure he will be safe and kindly cared for.

"I am getting very tired and must stop. God bless you!

"Your unfortunate cousin,

"JOHN LILLIS.

"P. S. The man in whose house I am stopping is named Nahum Sprague."

"You see, Mark, your mission will be one of mercy. The sooner the poor boy is rescued from such people as Mr. and Mrs. Sprague the better for

him. By the way, I don't want them to say my cousin has been an expense to them. Therefore I will authorize you to obtain from them an itemized account of what they have spent for him and the boy and pay it. You will see that they don't impose upon me by presenting too large a bill."

"Yes, sir. I will look sharply after your interests."

"I shall give you more than enough to get you to San Francisco, and I will give you a letter to a firm there, authorizing you to draw upon them for any sum you may require up to a thousand dollars."

"But that will be a great deal more than I shall need."

"I presume so, but I give you so large a credit to use in case of emergencies."

"You are trusting me very far, Mr. Gilbert."

"I am aware of that, but I feel entirely safe in doing so."

"Thank you, sir."

Other directions were given, and it was agreed that Mark should start on his long journey on Monday morning.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MARK AT OMAHA.

Some days later Mark found himself at Omaha. Here he was to transfer himself to the Union Pacific Railroad, at that time the only Pacific road built with the exception of the Central Pacific, which formed with it a continuous line to San Francisco. Mark decided to remain in Omaha for a single day and then take the train for his destination.

At the hotel Mark found himself sitting next to a man with bronzed face and rough attire who embodied his ideas of a miner. The stranger during the meal devoted himself strictly to business, but going out of the dining-room at the same time with Mark he grew sociable.

"Well, young pard." he said, "what's your trail?"

Mark looked puzzled.

"I mean which way are you going—East or West?"

"I am going to San Francisco."

"Ever been there before?"

Mark shook his head.

"I never was as far West as this before," he answered. "I came from New York."

"So I thought. You look like a tenderfoot. Are you going out to stay?"

"Only a short time. I am going after a young boy. I am going to carry him back with me."

"A kid, eh? You're not much more than a kid yourself."

"I guess I can take care of myself," said Mark with a smile.

"Shouldn't wonder. You look like it. Nothing soft about you."

"I hope I haven't got a soft head. As to my heart, I hope that isn't hard."

"Good for you. I reckon you're a likely kind of boy."

"I suppose you have been to California," said Mark, thinking it his turn to ask questions.

"Yes; I've been on the coast for three years, more or less."

"How do you like it out there?"

"Well, I've had my ups and downs. A year ago, six months for that matter, I was dead broke."

"Did your luck change?"

"Not till I struck Nevada. Then I got a small interest in the Golden Hope mine——"

"The Golden Hope mine?" exclaimed Mark in excitement.

"Do you know anything of that mine, youngster?"

"Yes; I have a—a friend who owns some stock in it."

"Then your friend is in luck. Why, do you know where the stock stands to-day?"

"No, but I should like to know."

"At 110."

Mark's eyes sparkled with joyous excitement.

"Is it possible?" he exclaimed.

"It's so. I've got a block of a hundred shares myself, which I bought eighteen months ago for a song. I give you my word I didn't think it worth more than a dollar or two a share—what I gave—when I learned not long since that they'd struck it rich, and I was no longer a pauper."

"That's good news for me," said Mark slowly.

"Why? Have you got any of it?"

"My mother is entitled to two hundred shares from her father's estate."

"Whew! Have you come out to see about it?"

"No; that was not my object, but I shall find out what I can about it."

"You're in luck."

"Well, perhaps so. But my uncle is trying to cheat my mother out of it."

"Then he must be a rascal. Tell me about it."

The man looked sympathetic and trustworthy, and Mark without hesitation told him the story as it is already known to the reader.

"Do you think the stock has reached its highest point?" he asked anxiously.

"No; it will probably rise to two hundred."

"Then my uncle probably won't close it out just at present."

"No; he will hear how the matter stands, and if he is sharp he will hold on."

"I am glad of that, for I want a little time to decide how to act."

"I am going to stop at the mine on my way to 'Frisco."

"I will give you my address and ask you to write me a line to the care of my banker there, letting me kuow what you can about the mine."

"All right, boy! I like you, and I'll do it. When do you start?"

"To-morrow."

"We'll start together, and I'll get off the train in Nevada."

CHAPTER XXIX.

NAHUM SPRAGUE AND HIS ORPHAN WARD.

Leaving Mark on his way we will precede him, and carry the reader at once to Gulchville, in California, where he was to find the young boy of whom Mr. Gilbert had requested him to take charge.

In an unpainted frame house lived Mr. Nahum Sprague. In New England such a building would hardly have cost over five hundred dollars, but here it had been erected at more than double the expense by the original owner. When he became out of health and left California it was bought for a trifling price by Nahum Sprague.

The letter was a man of forty-five with small eyes and a face prematurely wrinkled. He was well-to-do, but how he had gained his money no one knew. He and his wife, however, were mean and parsimonious.

They had one son, a boy of fifteen, who resembled them physically and mentally. He was named Oscar, after a gentleman of wealth, in the hope that at his death the boy would be remembered. Unfortunately

for Oscar the gentleman died without a will and his namesake received nothing.

The disappointed parents would gladly have changed the boy's name, but Oscar would not hear of it, preferring the name that had become familiar.

This was the family whose grudging hospitality had embittered the last days of John Lillis, and to them he was obliged to commit the temporary guardianship of his little son Philip.

In the field adjoining, Philip Lillis, a small pale boy, was playing when Oscar Sprague issued from the house.

"Come here, you little brat!" he said harshly.

Philip looked with a frightened expression.

"What do you want of me?" he asked.

"What do I want? Come here and see."

The little fellow approached.

He was received with a sharp slap in the face.

"Why do you hit me, Oscar?" Philip asked tearfully.

"Because you didn't come quicker," answered the young tyrant.

"I didn't know you were in a hurry."

"Well, you know it now."

"You wouldn't have hit me when papa was alive," said Philip with a flash of spirit.

"Well, he isn't alive, see?"

"I know he isn't, and I am alone in the world."

"Well, don't snivel! If anything makes me sick at the stomach it is to see a boy snivel."

"Maybe you'd cry if your papa was dead."

"There ain't much fear. The old man's too tough," responded Oscar, who had no sentimental love for his father. Indeed, it would have been surprising if he had shown any attachment to Nahum Sprague, who was about as unattractive in outward appearance as he was in character and disposition.

"You didn't tell me what you wanted me to do."

"Just wait till I tell you, smarty. Do you see this bottle?"

"Yes."

"Take it to the saloon and get it full of whisky."

"Papa didn't want me to go into a liquor saloon."

"Well, your papa ain't got nothing to do with you now. See? You just do as I tell you."

Philip took the bottle unwillingly and started for for the saloon.

"Mind you don't drink any of it on the way home," called out Oscar.

"As if I would," said Philip indignantly. "I don't drink whisky and I never will."

"Oh, you're an angel!" sneered Oscar. "You're

too good for this world. Ain't you afraid you'll die young, as they say good boys do?"

"I don't believe you'll die young, Oscar."

"Hey? Was that meant for an insult? But never mind! I don't pretend to be one of the goody-goody Sunday-school kids. Now mind you don't loiter on the way."

Oscar sat down on the doorstep and began to whittle.

The door opened and his father came out.

"Why didn't you go to the saloon as I told you?" he asked hastily.

"It's all the same. I sent Philip."

"You sent that boy? He ain't fit to send on such an errand."

"Why ain't he? He can ask to have the bottle filled, can't he?"

"What did he say? Was he willing to go?"

"He said his papa," mimicked Oscar, "didn't want him to go into a liquor saloon."

"He did, hey? All the more reason for making him go. His poverty-stricken father can't help him now. Why, I am keeping the boy from starving."

"Are you going to keep him always, dad?"

"I ought to turn him over to the town, but folks would talk. There's a man in New York that his father said would send for him. I don't know

whether he will or not. There's a matter of fifty dollars due to me for burying John Lillis. That's the way I get imposed upon."

Philip kept on his way to the saloon. He was a timid, sensitive boy, and he shrank from going into the place which was generally filled with rough men. Two miners were leaning against the front of the wooden shanty used for the sale of liquor when Philip appeared.

As he passed in one said to the other, "Well, I'll be jiggered if here isn't a kid comin' for his liquor. I say, kid, what do you want?"

"Some whisky," answered Philip timidly.

"How old are you?"

"Ten."

"I say, young 'un, you're beginnin' early."

"I don't want it for myself," returned Philip half indignantly.

"Oh, no, of course not. You won't take a sip yourself, of course not."

"No, I won't. My papa never drank whisky, and he told me not to."

"Where is your papa?"

"Gone to Heaven."

The miner whistled.

"Then who sent you for whisky?"

"Mr. Sprague."

"Old Nahum?"

"His name is Nahum."

"I thought he was too mean to buy whisky. Do you live with him?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is he any kin to you?"

"No," answered Philip quickly.

"Does he treat you well?"

"I don't like to answer such questions," said Philip guardedly.

"I suppose you are afraid to. Did your father leave any money?"

"No," answered Philip sadly.

"Then I understand how it is. Do you expect to keep on living with Mr. Sprague?"

"Papa wrote to a gentleman in New York. I expect he will send for me."

"I hope he will for your sake, poor little chap. Well, go on and get your whisky. I don't want to take up your time."

As Philip entered the first speaker remarked, "Well, Bill, I don't pretend to be an angel, but I wouldn't send a kid like that for whisky. I drink it myself, but I wouldn't want a boy like that to go for it. I'd go myself."

"I agree with you," said Bill. "That Sprague ain't of much account any way. I'd lick him myself for a dollar. He's about as mean as they make 'em."

CHAPTER XXX.

A CIRCUS IN MR. SPRAGUE'S YARD.

PHILIP timidly made known his request and the bottle was filled. The saloon-keeper attended to the order in a matter-of-fact manner. As long as he got his pay he cared very little whom he dealt with.

Philip, feeling ashamed of his burden, came out with the bottle and set out on his return home. He had been delayed by the conversation at the door, and he had also had to wait to have the bottle filled, there being several customers to attend to before him. So it happened that when he got back Mr. Sprague and Oscar were awaiting him impatiently.

"There the boy comes at last, father," said Oscar. "He's creeping like a snail."

Whisky was Mr. Sprague's one extravagance, and he had waited longer than usual for his customary drink. This made him irritable.

"Why don't you come along faster, you young beggar?" he called out harshly.

"I'll start him up, dad," said Oscar with alacrity.

"Do so!"

Oscar started down the road with a cruel light in his eyes. He liked nothing better than to ill-treat the unfortunate boy who had been left to the tender mercies of his father.

Philip did not understand what Oscar's coming portended till the older boy seized him violently by the shoulders.

"Why don't you hurry up?" he demanded. "Don't you know any better than to waste your time playing on the street?"

"I didn't waste any time. I couldn't get waited on at first."

"That's too thin! You were walking like a snail any way. I'll see if I can't make you stir your stumps a little faster."

Oscar pushed Philip so violently that the little fellow stumbled, and then came a catastrophe! He was thrown forward. The bottle came in contact with a stone, and of course broke, spilling the precious contents, as Nahum Sprague thought them.

"Now you've done it!" exclaimed Oscar. "I wouldn't be in your shoes, young man. Pa will flog you within an inch of your life."

"See what Philip has done, pa!" said Oscar, pointing to the broken bottle.

Nahum Sprague absolutely glared at the unfortunate boy. His throat was dry and parched, and his

craving for whisky was almost painful in its intensity. And now to have the cup dashed from his lips! It would take time to get a fresh supply, not to count the additional cost. His wrath was kindled against the poor boy.

"What made you break the bottle, you young rascal?" he demanded harshly.

"I didn't mean to," answered Philip, pale with fright.

"You didn't mean to? I suppose it fell of itself," retorted Mr. Sprague with sarcasm.

"Oscar pushed me," exclaimed Philip. "He pushed me very hard, or I wouldn't have dropped it."

"Now he wants to throw it all upon me, pa. Ain't you ashamed of yourself?"

"It's true, Oscar, and you know it," returned Philip with a show of spirit. "You said I didn't move fast enough."

"It's a wicked lie. I just touched you on the shoulder, and you broke the bottle out of spite."

"I have no doubt Oscar is right," said Nahum Sprague severely. "You have destroyed my property. You have broken the bottle as well as wasted the whisky. You are a wicked and ungrateful boy. Here I have been keeping you out of charity because your lazy and shiftless father left you nothing."

"Don't you say anything against my father,"

said Philip, his meek spirit aroused by this cruel aspersion of the only human being who had cared for him since his mother's death.

"Hoity, toity! Here's impudence! So I am not to say anything against your father after caring for him through his sickness and burying him at my own expense."

"I'll pay you back, Mr. Sprague, indeed I will," said Philip, his lip quivering.

"You'll pay me back, you who are nothing but a beggar. Well, here's cheek. You talk as if you were rich instead of a pauper."

"I'll pay you some time—I have no money now—but I'll work day and night when I am a man to pay you."

"That all sounds very well, but it don't pay me me for the bottle of whisky. I must give you a lesson for your carelessness. Oscar, go and get the horsewhip."

"I'll do it, dad," said Oscar joyfully.

He was naturally a cruel boy, and the prospect of seeing Philip flogged gave him the greatest pleasure.

There was a small outbuilding near the house which had once been used for a stable when Mr. Sprague kept a horse, but the last poor animal having pined away and died, as it was believed from insufficient

food, it was no longer in use except as a store house for various odds and ends. The horsewhip was saved over from the time when it was needed for its legitimate purpose.

"Oh, don't whip me, Mr. Sprague!" pleaded Philip, frightened at the last words of his cruel guardian.

He was a sensitive boy, one of the kind that thrives under kind influences, and droops under ill-treatment. He had a delicate physical organization that shrank from pain, which some boys bear with stoical fortitude.

It was not merely pain, but the humiliation of a blow that daunted him.

Mr. Sprague did not make any reply to his pleadings, but waited impatiently for Oscar to appear.

This was not long. Sent on a congenial errand Oscar wasted no time, but came out of the building promptly with the horsewhip in his hand.

"Here it is, dad!" he said, handing it to his father.

All this happened in open view of the house and of the public road. Mr. Sprague was so intent upon his plan of punishing Philip that he did not notice the approach of two men walking with unsteady steps along the highway and now close at hand. They were the two men who had talked with Philip

in front of the drinking saloon. They had been drinking, but had not reached the stage of helplessness.

"I say, Joe," said one, looking towards Nahum Sprague's house, "there's where old Sprague lives."

"He's a mean rascal," hiccoughed the other. "I'd like to thrash him."

"There's the kid—the one he sent to buy some drink. And there's old Sprague with a whip in his hand. I'll be dog-goned if he ain't goin' to lick him. It's a beastly shame. I say, suppose we take a hand."

"All right, Bill."

Meanwhile Nahum Sprague, quite unaware that he was likely to be interfered with, took the whip from the hand of his son. He looked at Philip very much as a cat looks at a mouse whom she is preparing to swallow.

"Now you're going to catch it," he announced, with a cruel gleam in his eyes. "Now you're going to see what you get for spilling my whisky. I'll learn you!"

"Oh, please don't whip me, Mr. Sprague!" pleaded Philip. "Indeed, I didn't mean to break the bottle."

"That's too thin! You didn't want to go for the whisky in the first place. You said your *papa*,"

"Nahum brought the whip down with a swish on Philip's legs."—Page 235.
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with a mocking sneer, "didn't like to have you go to a saloon."

"That's true, but I went."

"Because you had to. You are lazy and put on airs, just as if you wasn't a beggar dependent on me for the bread you eat and the clothes you wear."

"My father bought me these clothes," said Philip.

"Suppose he did? When you have worn them out you'll expect me to buy you some more."

"What are you waiting for, pa?" asked Oscar impatiently. "If you're going to lick him, why don't you do it?"

"I'm going to," said Nahum, and, raising the whip he brought it down with a swish around the legs of the poor boy.

Philip cried with pain, dancing up and down, and Oscar went into a fit of laughter at what he thought an amusing spectacle.

"That's the talk, dad!" exclaimed Oscar. "You gave it to him good. Give it to him again."

"I mean to," said Nahum grimly, and he raised the whip a second time.

"Say, Joe, are we going to stand this?" asked Bill.

"Not by a long shot! Follow me, pard."

Mr. Sprague's back was turned to the street, and he did not see the quick approach of the two miners.

He was just about to bring down the whip again upon poor defenseless Philip when he thought he was struck by a cyclone.

Bill seized him by the collar, while Joe snatched the whip from his hand.

"Why, why, what's all this?" asked the astonished man in dismay.

"Two can play at your little game," answered Joe. "You can stand it better than the kid," and he lashed the unfortunate Nahum across the legs just as Philip had suffered a short time before.

"Stop, stop!" yelled Nahum, who was a coward at heart. "What do you mean? I'll have the law of you."

"That's what you were doing to the kid. I'll give you a dose of your own medicine," and Mr. Sprague received a second stroke.

"Give me the whip, Joe!" cried Bill. "Give me a chance at him! Don't keep all the fun to yourself."

"All right! Here it is."

Bill used the whip quite as effectively as his friend Joe.

"You stop licking my pa!" exclaimed Oscar, not daring, however, to approach the scene of conflict.

"I say, kid, what was he licking you for?" asked Bill after the first blow.

"He said I broke the bottle and spilled the whisky."

"And did you?"

"Yes, but Oscar pushed me and made me do it."

"Who's Oscar?"

"That boy there."

"Oho! so he's to blame for it."

"It's a lie!" retorted Oscar.

"It isn't. I know the kid's telling the truth. He deserves a dose, too. Bring him here, Joe."

Joe advanced upon Oscar, and after a short chase seized him by the collar, and brought him up to the self-appointed dispenser of justice.

"Hold him tight, Joe!"

Then Oscar felt the whip lash coiling around his legs.

"You quit that!" he howled in anger and dismay.

"One more will do you good. You're bigger than the kid and you can stand it better."

A second time the lash descended with even greater force, and Oscar jumped and danced as Philip had done before him, but somehow it didn't seem to impress him as so funny.

"You'd better give the old man more and then we'll let him go," said Joe.

"I'll have you arrested!" shrieked Nahum

Sprague, but in spite of his threat he received another dose of the same medicine.

"When you want some more call on us!" said Bill.

As he spoke he flung the whip out into the street, and the two ministers of justice went off laughing.

"If they try to lick you again, kid, come and tell us," Joe called back.

CHAPTER XXXI.

PHILIP FINDS A FRIEND.

When the two unauthorized ministers of justice had departed Oscar and his father looked at each other in anger and stupefaction.

"It's an outrage!" exclaimed Nahum Sprague.

"I'd like to shoot them!" returned Oscar. "I'd like to see them flayed within an inch of their lives."

"So would I. They are the most audacious desperadoes I ever encountered."

"Do you know them, dad?"

"Yes; they are Bill Murphy and Joe Hastings. They are always hanging round the drinking saloon."

"We can lick Philip at any rate!" said Oscar, with a furious look at poor Phil. "He brought it on us."

But Nahum Sprague was more prudent. He had heard the threat of Bill and Joe to repeat the punishment if Philip were attacked, and he thought it best to wait.

"Leave it to me," he said. "I'll flog him in due time."

"Ain't you going to do anything to him, dad?" asked Oscar in disappointment.

"Yes. Come here, you, sir!"

Phil approached his stern guardian with an uncomfortable sense of something unpleasant awaiting him.

Nahum Sprague seized him by the collar and said, "Follow me."

He pushed the boy before him and walked him into the house, then up the stairs into an attic room, where he locked him in. Just then the bell rang for dinner.

Poor Phil was hungry, but nothing was said about dinner for him. A dread suspicion came to him that he was to be starved. But half an hour later the door opened, and Oscar appeared with two thin slices of bread without butter.

"Here's your dinner," he said.

It was a poor enough provision for a hungry boy, but Phil ate them with relish, Oscar looking on with an amused smile.

"Is that all I am to have?" asked Phil.

"Yes; it is all you deserve."

"I don't know what I have done."

"You don't, hey? You broke the bottle and spilled the whisky."

"I wouldn't have done it if you hadn't pushed me."

"There you go, laying it off on me. You'd better not."

"But it's true, Oscar."

"No, it isn't. You broke the bottle to spite pa."

"I wouldn't have dared to do it," said Philip.

"You dared a little too much, anyway. Didn't you get those men to follow you and interfere with what was none of their business?"

"No, I didn't."

"Hadn't you spoken with them at the saloon?"

"Yes."

"I thought so."

"They asked me who sent me for the whisky and I told them."

"You didn't need to tell them. If it hadn't been for that they wouldn't have come round to our place and assaulted pa and me. They'll catch it, pa says. Shouldn't wonder if they'd be put in prison for five years."

Young as he was Phil put no faith in this ridiculous statement, but he thought it best not to make any comment.

"How long is your father going to keep me here?" he asked.

"Maybe a month."

This opened a terrible prospect to poor Phil, who thought Mr. Sprague quite capable of inflicting such a severe punishment.

"If he does I won't live through it," he said desperately.

"You don't mean to kill yourself?" said Oscar, startled.

"No, but I shall starve. I am awfully hungry now."

"What, after eating two slices of bread?"

"They were very thin, and I have exercised a good deal."

"Then I advise you to make it up with pa. If you get down on your knees and tell him you are sorry, perhaps he will forgive you, and let you out."

Phil did not feel willing to humiliate himself in that way, and remained silent.

"There ain't any bed for me to sleep on," he said, looking around.

"You will have to sleep on the floor. I guess you'll get enough of it."

Oscar locked the door on the outside and went down-stairs. Disagreeable as he was Phil was sorry to have him go. He was some company, and when left to himself there was nothing for him to do. If there had been any paper or book in the room it

would have helped him tide over the time, but the apartment was bare of furniture.

There was one window looking out on the side of the house. Phil posted himself at this, and soon saw Oscar and his father leave the premises and go down the street. Nahum had a bottle in his hand, and Phil concluded he was going to the drinking saloon to get a fresh bottle of whisky.

Phil continued to look out of the window.

Presently he saw a boy pass whom he knew—a boy named Arthur Burks.

He opened the window and called out eagerly, "Arthur!"

Arthur turned round and looking up espied Philip.

"Hello!" he cried. "What are you doing up there?"

"I am locked in."

"What for?"

"I accidentally dropped a bottle of whisky, and spilled it. Mr. Sprague got mad and locked me up here."

"That's a shame. How long have you got to stay?"

"Oscar says he may keep me here a month."

"He's only frightening you. Old Sprague wouldn't dare to do it."

"That isn't all. I am half starved. He only gave me two small slices of bread for dinner."

"He's a mean old hunks. I just wish you could come round to our house. We'd give you enough to eat."

"I wish I were there now," sighed Philip.

"I've got an idea," said Arthur, brightening up. "What time do Mr. Sprague and Oscar go to bed?"

"Very early. About nine o'clock."

"Would you run away if you could?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll tell you what I'll do. At half-past nine Albert Frost and I will come around with a tall ladder—Mr. Frost has got one—and we'll put it up against your window. Will you dare to get out of the window, and come down?"

"Yes, I'll do anything to get away. But can you get the ladder?"

"Yes; Albert will manage it. Do you think the old man will be likely to see or hear us?"

"No; he sleeps on the other side of the house."

"All right! You can expect us. I guess I had better go now, for fear I may be seen, and they might suspect something."

"But where can I go when I leave here?"

"Come to our house. You can sleep with Rob, my little brother."

"Thank you, Arthur. I'll expect you."

Philip felt a good deal more cheerful after Arthur had gone. He knew that in Arthur's house he would be very differently treated from what he had been by Nahum Sprague. He did not feel it wrong to leave the Spragues', as they were constantly complaining that he was a burden.

"If Mr. Burks would only let me live with him," he thought, "I should be happy, and I would be willing to work hard."

At half-past five Oscar came up to the room again, this time accompanied by his father.

"How do you like being locked up here?" asked Nahum.

"Not very well."

"Get down on your knees and beg my pardon for your bad conduct, and I will let you out."

"I would rather not, sir."

"Do you hear that, Oscar? He would rather not."

"I heard it, pa."

"It is only right that he should suffer the penalty of his headstrong conduct. Give him his supper and we will leave him to think of his sinfulness."

Oscar produced two more thin slices of bread and a cup of very weak tea.

"You are not entitled to tea," said Nahum. "It is only because we are kind-hearted that I permitted Mrs. Sprague to send up a cup. I have not put in milk or sugar because I refuse to pamper you."

Philip made no comment, but disposed of the tea and bread in a very short space of time. He felt ready to join in with Oliver, in Dickens's immortal story, when he asked for "more." But he knew it would be of no use.

"Now, we will go down, Oscar."

"All right, pa. I hope the house won't catch fire in the night," he added, with the laudable purpose of terrifying Philip, "for we might not be able to come up and unlock the door."

Philip felt uncomfortable, but he reflected that before many hours, if Arthur Burks kept his promise, he would no longer be an inmate of Mr. Sprague's home.

"He'll have a sweet time sleeping on the floor, pa," said Oscar as they went down-stairs.

"It will serve the little fool right," returned Nahum Sprague grimly.

CHAPTER XXXII.

NAHUM SPRAGUE'S SURPRISE.

PHILIP waited impatiently from supper-time till half-past nine o'clock. Fortunately Mr. Sprague and Oscar went to bed rather earlier than usual.

On account of Philip's being locked up some of the "chores" which he had been accustomed to do fell to the father and son. So it happened that when it was twenty minutes to eight Mr. Sprague said: "I feel sleepy. I think I shall turn in now."

"I am sleepy too, pa," said Oscar. "I wonder how Philip feels."

"You can sleep with him if you want to," said Mr. Sprague jocosely.

"Thank you, dad. You're very kind, but I don't care to sleep on the floor. I guess the young beggar will feel pretty sore in the morning."

"It's his own fault," said Nahum grimly.

"All the same you'd better let him out to-morrow. I don't care about doing his chores right along."

"I'll see about that. Whenever he will get down on his knees and beg my pardon he can go free."

By nine o'clock Mr. and Mrs. Sprague and Oscar were in bed, and by half-past nine all were fast asleep. The whole family were good sleepers, and it may be added for the senior Sprague that he was a good snorer also.

Philip posted himself at the window. About five minutes after the time agreed upon he saw in the moonlight his two boy friends approaching, bearing between them a long ladder.

His heart leaped within him. They had not forgotten him after all.

He stood at the open window and waved his hand.

"There he is, Albert!" said Arthur Burks. "I guess he's glad to see us. We'll soon have him out of there."

The two boys came under the window and called up softly:

"Has old Sprague gone to bed?"

"Yes," answered Phil. "I hear him snoring."

"I hope they are all fast asleep," said Albert. "Here, Arthur, you just hold on to the ladder while I raise it."

"Do you think it is tall enough?" asked Arthur.

"I'll risk it."

The two boys worked till they had the ladder raised and leaning against the window.

"Will you dare to get out of the window and get down?" asked Arthur.

"I guess so."

"Be very careful. You don't want to fall."

Cautiously Phil put out one leg and placed his foot on one rung of the ladder. Then clutching firm hold of the side he put out the other, and now he had both feet on the rung.

"Now come down carefully!" said Albert.

Phil followed directions. He was only ten years old, and he certainly did feel a little timid, but he felt that behind him was a prison and before him was liberty, and he did not hesitate. So rung by rung he cautiously descended, till he stood on the ground beside the ladder in the company of his two friends.

"Bravo, Phil!" said Arthur Burks. "You've done splendidly. Now, Albert, let's get away before old Sprague hears us."

The ladder was carefully taken down, and the two boys walked off with it. Albert at the head and Arthur at the foot, while Phil followed behind.

"We'll go to your house first, Albert, and take the ladder," said Arthur. "Then Phil will go home with me."

The two boys lived not far apart, and this arrangement proved convenient.

"I wonder what old Sprague will say in the morning," laughed Albert. "He'll wonder how in the world Philip got away."

"Perhaps he'll think he jumped out of the window."

"How do you feel, Phil?" asked Arthur.

"I feel pretty hungry."

"What did you have for supper?"

"Two thin slices of bread and a cup of tea."

"I guess we'll find something in the pantry at our house," said Arthur, "unless Rob's got out of bed and eaten it up."

By ten o'clock the ladder was replaced and the several boys were safe at home.

Arthur was as good as his word. He got out some bread and butter, some cold meat and a glass of milk, and Philip made a hearty meal.

"I haven't had as good a supper for a long time," he said with a deep sigh of satisfaction.

"That's why you're so skinny. If we had you here we'd soon fat you up. Now are you ready to go to bed?"

"Yes, Arthur. How kind you are to me."

"I can't compare with your friend Oscar, Phil."

"I hope not. Oscar's about as mean a boy as I know. He's very different from you and Albert."

Meanwhile unconscious of the loss of one of their

little household Mr. and Mrs. Sprague and Oscar slumbered on till after sunrise.

"Get up, Oscar!" called Nahum Sprague, going to his son's room. "You must get up."

"What must I get up for?" grumbled Oscar.

"Because you will have to do Philip's chores this morning."

"Why don't you call him, pa? I don't see why I should do his work."

"Because he is locked up for punishment. I am not ready to let him out yet."

"It seems to me I am being punished. He has nothing to do while I have to get up early and work."

"Would you be willing to change places with him, be locked up all day, live on bread and water, and sleep on the hard floor?"

"Well, he's done it, and now you might let him out and set him to work."

"I have already said that I would let him out when he got down on his knees and begged my pardon."

"And have I got to do his work till he begs your pardon? I say, that ain't fair."

"I begin to think, Oscar, you are very lazy. I'll tell you what you may do. When you are dressed you may go to the door of the attic room and ask

Philip if he is ready to apologize to me. If he says yes, I'll go up and receive his apology, and then he can come down and go to work."

"All right, pa, I'll do it. I guess he's got enough by this time."

Five minutes later Oscar was at Philip's door. He had forgotten to bring up the key which his father had taken down-stairs the evening previous.

He put his mouth to the keyhole, first rapping at the door to command attention.

"I say, you Phil!" he called out.

There was no answer.

Oscar rapped again.

"Philip Lillis!" he called.

For reasons which we understand, though Oscar didn't, there was no response.

Oscar became angry, and began to pound vigorously at the door.

"There, if he doesn't hear that he must be deaf?" he said to himself.

"I say, do you want to be let out?"

No answer.

"He hears me, and won't answer out of pure spite," reflected Oscar indignantly.

He continued to pound.

"Look here, you young beggar," he cried, "if you don't answer me I'll get pa to bring up the horse-

whip and flog you within an inch of your life. There won't be any bar-room loafers to save you this time."

Even this threat seemed to produce no effect, and Oscar, quite out of temper, descended the stairs.

"Well," said Mr. Sprague, "what does he say?"

"What does he say? He won't say anything."

"Perhaps he didn't hear you," suggested Mr. Sprague.

"If he didn't he must be as deaf as a post."

"Slickening, is he?"

"That's about the size of it."

"Well, we can cure him of that."

"I'll tell you what to do, pa. I'll get the horse-whip and you can give him a good thrashing. I told him you would. There won't be any one to interfere up there."

"That's true. Go and get the whip, Oscar."

No employment was more congenial. Oscar went down-stairs with alacrity and soon reappeared with the whip. By this time his father was dressed and ready for action.

"Here's the whip, pa. May I go up with you?"

"Yes; come up."

Father and son ascended the stairs and stood before Philip's door.

"Speak to him first, pa, and see if he will answer you."

Nahum Sprague in a stern and authoritative tone called "Philip."

No answer.

"Didn't I tell you, pa."

"Philip Lillis!"

Again no reply.

"I didn't think the boy would be so owdacious. I'll soon learn him!"

Mr. Sprague turned the key and opened the door, entering the room with upraised whip. He gave a gasp of surprise.

"Why, he isn't here!" he ejaculated.

"Isn't here?" shouted Oscar in amazement.

"No; and the winder is open," exclaimed Mr. Sprague.

"He wouldn't dare to jump out, would he?"

Nahum Sprague advanced to the window and put his head out, expecting to see Philip on the ground beneath, perhaps with a broken limb. But no Philip was visible!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A CHANGE FOR PHILIP.

Mr. Sprague and Oscar looked at each other in complete stupefaction.

"What does it mean? Where can the boy have gone?" ejaculated Nahum.

"I'll be blest if I know," returned Oscar.

"The door was locked. He must have gone through the window. There wasn't any rope in the room, was there?"

"No."

"And if he jumped out he would certainly have broken his neck, or his limbs."

"He wouldn't have dared to jump. He's no braver than a mouse."

"It's the most mysterious thing I ever heard of," said Mr. Spargue, wrinkling his brows.

"What are you going to do about it, dad?"

"I don't know. I'm flabbergasted."

I'll tell you what to do when you get him back," suggested Oscar. "Give him a sound thrashing. It will do him good."

"You can depend upon that. I think it may be

well after breakfast for you to go round and inquire if he has been seen in the village."

"What shall I say about his running away?"

"Say he's a little touched in the upper story."

"I guess he'd better be touched somewhere else," said Oscar with a loud laugh at his own wit.

Considerably to his disgust Oscar was set to work doing some of Philip's chores directly after breakfast, and it was nine o'clock before he got ready to start in quest of Philip. Even then he did not start, for an open buggy stopped at the gate, driven by a man from the village, and containing as passenger, a boy of sixteen. This boy was Mark Mason, as the reader will easily conjecture.

"Who's that, Oscar! Is it one of your friends?" asked Nahum Sprague.

"No; never saw him before in my life."

Mark advanced directly to Mr. Sprague.

"Is this Mr. Nahum Sprague?" he asked.

"Yes; that's my name."

"Does a boy named Philip Lillis live with you?"

"And what if there does?" inquired Mr. Sprague cautiously.

"I am sent from New York to take charge of him."

"You! A boy like you?" exclaimed Nahum in surprise. "Why, you ain't over sixteen."

"You've guessed my age exactly," said Mark with a smile.

"Who sends you?"

"Mr. David Gilbert."

"Is he—rich?" asked Nahum curiously.

"Well, he's pretty well off."

"And he is willing to take care of the boy?"

"Yes. Can I see Philip?"

"Well," answered Nahum Sprague in an embarrassed tone, "you can pretty soon."

"And why not now?"

"The fact is, rather a cur'us thing happened last night. The boy disappeared."

"Is that true?" asked Mark with some suspicion.

"Yes. Fact is, the boy ain't quite right in his head."

"I am sorry for that," said Mark gravely. "How long has he been affected that way?"

"Only lately, I don't think it will last."

"Please tell me the circumstances."

"Why, we locked him in the attic for fear he might get out and come to some harm when he was light-headed, and this morning we couldn't find him."

"Please show me the room."

Though a boy, Mark spoke with unconscious

authority, and Mr. Sprague immediately complied with his request.

He led the way up into the attic, and Mark looked into the room. He was struck at once with its bare, unfurnished aspect.

"Did the boy spend the night here?" he asked abruptly.

"Yes."

"Where did he sleep?"

Mr. Sprague saw his mistake too late.

"Why—the fact is," he said hesitating, "the boy acted badly, and I confined him here as a punishment."

"Expecting him to sleep on the floor?"

"Well, yes—as a punishment."

"How old is the boy?"

"Ten years old."

"Then all I can say is, that you treated him very cruelly."

"That ain't the way to talk to me," blustered Sprague. "I guess I know the way to treat boys. You're only a boy yourself."

"That is true, but what has that got to do with it?"

"You should be more respectful to your elders."

"Suppose we get back to business, Mr. Sprague. Has Philip ever run away before?"

"No, and it's very ungrateful for him to do it now. Why, I have supported him ever since his father's death, and I paid the expenses of his father's funeral."

"I shall probably repay you for that—when you find, and deliver to me the boy."

This was welcome intelligence to Mr. Sprague, who straightway became very polite to Mark.

"Thank you, my dear young friend. I wouldn't accept it if I was not a poor man. I am very much attached to the boy, and I wouldn't let him go if I could afford to keep him. Oscar, go to the village at once and see if you can see anything of Philip."

"I will go with him, Mr. Sprague."

"Very well; but be sure to come back before you take him away."

"I certainly shall. It would not be fair to you to do otherwise. You may get ready the items of expense while I am gone."

"Thank you, I will."

"How provoking that Philip should go away just at this time!" thought Nahum. "It seems so mysterious, too. I do hope nothing has happened to the boy, or this fellow, who seems very sharp, may not be willing to pay me my bill."

Meanwhile Oscar and Mark went to the village.

"Do you live in New York?" asked Oscar.

"Yes."

"Are you Mr. Gilbert's son?"

"No; I am only his messenger."

"And you actually came all the way from New York alone?"

"Yes."

"Did he give you plenty of money for traveling?"

"Well, a pretty good sum," answered Mark, smiling. "What do you think has become of Philip?"

"Blest if I know. I don't see how he could get out of the window."

"I hope he hasn't come to any harm."

"Oh, I guess not," said Oscar indifferently.

"Do you like the boy?" asked Mark keenly.

"Well, I don't care much about kids," answered Oscar.

"Have you any idea where Philip would be likely to go? Has he ever left home before?"

"No; and he wouldn't now if he wasn't crazy."

At this moment they met Albert Frost.

"Do you know that boy?" asked Mark. "Perhaps he has seen Philip."

"I say, Albert," said Oscar, "have you seen anything of Philip Lillis?"

"Why do you ask? Don't he live at your house?"

"Yes, but he's taken French leave."

Something in Albert's face led Mark to suspect

that he knew more of Philip than he cared to tell, also that he was a friend of the young boy.

"I have come from New York to take Philip with me," he said significantly. "A friend of his father is going to adopt him."

"Is this sure?" asked Albert.

"Yes; I am very anxious to find the boy."

"Come here," said Albert. "Perhaps I can put you on his track. No, not you?" This last was addressed to Oscar.

"Now," went on Albert, "can I depend on your being a friend of Philip?"

"Yes, you can. The boy will be in good hands when he reaches New York."

"He isn't now," said Albert. "I helped him escape from old Sprague's last night. I can get him for you."

"Do so then."

"You are sure Sprague won't beat him?"

"Yes; I am to pay him some money, and I won't do it if any harm comes to the boy."

"Go back with Oscar," said Albert aloud, "and I will have Philip at the house inside of half an hour."

"Where is he?" asked Oscar curiously.

"I don't know—exactly, but I can find him."

"Is he at your house?"

"No. Go back and you will soon see him."

Nahum Sprague was much pleased when the two boys brought home this intelligence. He had prepared a bill for expenses amounting to a hundred dollars, on which his profit would be considerable. Money with him was all powerful, and though he would have been glad to give Philip a good thrashing, he cared still more for money.

When Philip made his appearance, accompanied by Albert and Arthur Burks, Mr. Sprague greeted him with a genial smile.

"I am almost tempted to call you a bad boy," he said. "You have made me feel quite anxious. This young gentleman has come here to take you to New York. We shall miss you sadly, Mrs. Sprague and I, but if it is for your good we won't complain."

"Are you willing to go with me, Philip?" asked Mark.

Philip looked up in Mark's face, and did not hesitate a moment.

"Yes," he said, placing his hand in Mark's; "I am ready to go now."

"I don't know whether your clothes are ready," said Mr. Sprague. "They may need washing."

Poor Philip's appearance was such that Mark felt that he would at once have to buy him a new outfit.

"Never mind about the clothes, Mr. Sprague," he said. "I shall buy Philip some new ones."

When they were preparing to start Mr. Sprague ostentatiously wiped his eyes on a large bandana handkerchief.

"Pardon my emotion, Mr. Mason," he said, addressing Mark, "but Philip is very near and dear to me, and so was his father. I cannot part from him without a pang. Yet if he is to be better off I will not murmur. Philip, my dear child, don't forget your uncle Nahum."

"I shall remember you, Mr. Sprague," said Philip. This at least he could say with truth.

"Thank you, thank you! I thought you would."

"I say, kid," put in Oscar, "my birthday comes the 17th of October. If you're rich and prosperous, you might send me a birthday gift."

Philip smiled. All this unwonted attention amused him.

"I won't forget you, Oscar," he said.

The buggy drove up, and Mark helped Philip inside.

"If you want to cry, don't mind me," he said to Philip with a smile.

"If I cry, it will be for joy," said Philip. "I never want to see Mr. Sprague or any of his family again."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ON THE WAY HOME.

At San Francisco Mark stopped over a day to buy some clothing for Philip.

"Did Mr. Sprague select your clothes, Philip?" asked Mark. "If so, I can't compliment him on his taste."

"They are some old clothes of Oscar's," answered Philip. "They are the best I could get."

"We'll see if San Francisco can't furnish you with something better."

At a clothing store on Market Street, Mark bought a complete outfit for Philip. The latter was much pleased when he saw his transformation in a pier glass in the store.

"Now I shall have nothing to remind me of Mr. Sprague," he said. "Do you want me to take the old clothes with me?"

"No; we will leave them here."

They stopped at the Russ House. Just after supper Mark met an old acquaintance, the bronzed miner whom he had seen in Omaha. The latter walked up eagerly and grasped Mark's hand.

"It does me good to see you again, young pard," he said. "And is this the kid?"

"Yes."

"Well, upon my word he looks like a little gentleman."

"He has improved in appearance since I made his acquaintance in Gulchville," said Mark with a smile. "I have just bought him a new outfit."

"So, so! Well, fine feathers make fine birds. Well, my boy, does Mark make you call him father?"

Philip laughed heartily at the idea.

"Why, he's only a boy!" he rejoined.

"Philip," said Mark with a warning finger, "you must treat me with proper respect."

"Shall I call you father?"

"No; perhaps it will be more suitable to call me brother Mark. Did you stop over in Nevada, Mr. Dempsey?"

"Yes; I went to the mine."

"What did you learn?"

"That a New York syndicate is trying to purchase the mine, and this has carried up the price of stock to two hundred and fifty dollars."

Mark's eyes sparkled.

"Why that would make mother's share worth fifty thousand dollars," he said.

"I advise you to take measures to secure your

mother's rights as soon as you reach home. There is danger in delay."

"I certainly will follow your advice, Mr. Dempsey. Shall you hold on to your shares?"

"No. I think I will sell out. I have an offer from a man in Virginia City which I think I shall accept. The stock may go higher, but again it may go lower. My shares will bring twenty-five thousand dollars, and that will make a man like me rich."

"I wish I had control of mother's stock now," said Mark. "I could realize a price which would make her comfortable for life."

The sudden rise in the value of the Golden Hope shares was already known in New York. Mr. Talbot on receiving the intelligence called on his brokers, Crane & Lawton.

"Would you advise me to sell now, Mr. Crane?" he asked.

"Wait a week, Mr. Talbot, and you may realize a few more points. Then you had better unload."

"I will be guided by your advice. I am sure it is for the best."

There was still, however, a feeling of uneasiness in the mind of Mr. Talbot, who knew very well that Mrs. Mason was the rightful owner of half the stock which he controlled. He decided to call on his sister in-law once more, and urge her to sign a paper re-

leasing him from further liability as executor of her father's estate.

"I wonder whether Mark has got back," he said to himself. "If not, probably Ellen is very short of money. I will offer, if necessary, five hundred dollars for her signature. I don't think she can resist that."

Mrs. Mason had just finished washing her breakfast dishes when there was a knock at the door. Opening it, she saw the familiar face of Tom Trotter, dressed in the uniform of a Western Uniform telegraph boy.

"What, Tom!" she exclaimed in surprise. "Have you changed your business?"

"Yes, Mrs. Mason," answered Tom complacently. "I've give up blackin' boots, and now I'm a messenger boy like Mark."

"You look very nice in your uniform, Tom. There's another improvement I see."

"What is that, Mrs. Mason?"

"Your hands and face are both clean."

"I've got to keep clean now," said Tom soberly. "It seems kind of strange, but I guess I'll get used do it. When I look in the glass I don't hardly know myself."

"Don't you like it better?"

"Well, I guess I shall when I get used to it. But

I forgot, I've got a message for you," and Tom drew out an official envelope,

"It must be from Mark," said Mrs. Mason in excitement, and she tore open the dispatch and read as follows:

OMAHA, Sept. 17.

Shall be home on Friday. MARK.

"Mark will be home on Friday, Tom!" said the happy mother. "How glad I shall be!"

"Hurray!" exclaimed Tom. "That's good news."

"Come round and take dinner with us Sunday, Tom. We'll have a little feast in honor of Mark's return."

"I'll see, Mrs. Mason. I was engaged to take dinner with Jay Gould, but I'll telegraph him I can't come."

"I am afraid we can't give you as good a dinner as Jay Gould."

"You'll have Mark here and that's better than the best dinner Jay can give me. Shall I wear my swallow tail?"

"No; your uniform will do."

Tom Trotter had hardly gone out when there was another knock at the door. On opening it Mrs. Mason was somewhat surprised to see her brother-in-

law. Solon Talbot's manner was very gracious and patronizing.

"I hope you are well, Ellen," he said extending his hand."

"Thank you, I am quite well," replied Mrs. Mason.

"And Edith too?"

Mr. Talbot seldom took any notice of Edith, but he had an object to gain now.

"Yes, Edith is well. She has just gone to school."

"I think I heard that Mark was absent from the city."

"Yes, he is away."

"He has been gone some time?"

"Yes."

"I should think you would miss him."

"So I do. I miss him constantly."

"You must find it hard to get along without him —financially I mean."

"He left some money behind. I am not in want."

"Ellen, I am really sorry to see you living in such a poor way. These humble rooms are not suitable for you."

Mrs. Mason was rather astonished to hear these words from her brother-in-law. She did not understand that he was preparing the way for another offer.

"It would certainly be pleasant for me to live

better," she said. "I hope to when Mark gets older."

"You had better not count too much upon that. An office boy's wages seldom amount to much. How much does he earn?"

"He averaged about five dollars a week as a telegraph messenger."

"So I supposed. He may get a dollar or two more in a year or two—but what is that?"

"It isn't much," Mrs. Mason admitted.

"I was talking the matter over with Mary the other day, and it is largely on her account that I came here this morning to make a proposal to you."

"Now it's coming!" thought Mrs. Mason. "Well?" she said.

"And I have made up my mind to offer you five hundred dollars."

"That is very kind," said Mrs. Mason demurely.

"On condition that you sign this paper releasing me from all responsibility as executor of your father's estate."

"This seems important to you, Solon," said Mrs. Mason keenly.

"It is a matter of form. I shall present it at the probate court. But it gives me an excuse for offering you a generous gift."

"I will think it over, Solon."

"Think it over? What thinking over do you need? I am not sure that I can give you time for that, as the gift is entirely voluntary on my part. I have brought the money with me, and in five minutes you can be a comparatively rich woman."

"I have just had a telegram from Mark saying that he will be home on Friday. I will wait till he comes. If you will come round Saturday——"

"I can't promise," said Talbot, deeply disappointed. "You stand very much in your own light."

"I can make no other answer, Solon."

"Confound that young meddler, Mark!" muttered Talbot as he left the house. "But for him I should have no difficulty in obtaining his mother's signature."

CHAPTER XXXV.

EDGAR GETS INTO TROUBLE.

While Solon Talbot was intent upon making money, his son Edgar was left to spend his time pretty much as he pleased. His father had secured him a place with a firm of brokers in Wall Street, in fact in the office of Crane & Lawton, through whom he intended to dispose of his mining stocks.

Edgar received five dollars a week, and this his father allowed him to keep for himself. But five dollars a week in a city like New York won't go very far when a boy gives up his evenings to playing pool.

One night Edgar made the acquaintance of a showy young man whom he ignorantly supposed belonged to a prominent New York family. It was in fact our old acquaintance, Hamilton Schuyler, with whom Mark had already had some experiences which did not impress him very much in the young man's favor.

Schuyler's attention was drawn to Edgar at a pool-room in the neighborhood of Forty-Second Street, and he made inquiries about him. Ascertain-

ing that Edgar's father was supposed to be rich he cultivated his acquaintance, and flattered him artfully.

"You play a good game of billiards, Mr. Talbot," he said.

"Oh, fair," answered Edgar complacently.

"Do you mind having a game with me?"

"You probably play a good deal better than I do."

"We can try and see. By the way, let me introduce myself," and he handed Edgar his card.

"Schuyler Hamilton!" read Edgar, "that is an old name, is it not?"

"Yes," answered Schuyler carelessly. "I am related to most of the old Knickerbocker families. I am very particular whom I associate with, but I saw at once that you were a gentleman."

Foolish Edgar was very much flattered.

"My father is a capitalist," he said. "We used to live in Syracuse, but he thinks he can make more money in New York."

"Just so. There are plenty of chances of making money here. I made five thousand dollars in Wall Street last week myself."

"You did!" exclaimed Edgar dazzled.

"Yes. Sometimes I have made more. I don't often lose. Which ball will you select. The spot?"

"Yes."

"I suppose it takes considerable money to speculate in Wall Street?"

"Oh no, not on a margin."

"I should like to make a strike myself. I am in the office of Crane & Lawton."

"Are you indeed? I never did any business with them, but I understand that they stand very high."

"I think they are rich."

The game was played, and resulted in the success of Edgar.

"Really, you play a strong game. Suppose—just for the excitement of it—we stake a dollar on the next game. What do you say?"

"All right!"

Edgar had received his week's pay in the afternoon, and was well provided. He flattered himself he could play better than Schuyler, and thought it would be very agreeable to win money in that way. Schuyler managed to let him win.

"Really," he said with pretended annoyance, "I am afraid you are more than a match for me."

"Perhaps I was lucky," said Edgar, elated.

"At any rate I will try again. Let us call it two dollars."

"Very well," assented Edgar.

Somehow this game was won by his opponent by

five points. Edgar was annoyed, for this took a dollar from his pocket, and it had been arranged that the loser should pay for the use of the tables.

It was an accident, however, and he kept on. At the close of the evening he was without a cent.

"I have been unlucky," he said, trying to hide his mortification. "I have lost all the money I had with me."

"That is too bad. Here gave me a memorandum for two dollars, and I will hand you back that amount. Some time when you are in funds you can pay me."

"Thank you!" said Edgar in a tone of relief.

"You are really a better player than I am," went on Schuyler, "but the balls happened to run in my favor. Another evening I shall be the loser."

This was the first of Edgar's acquaintance with Schuyler Hamilton, but it was by no means the last. They got into the way of meeting nearly every night and Edgar ran more and more into Schuyler's debt. However, Hamilton was very easy with him. He accepted memorandums of indebtedness, which somehow seemed a very easy way of paying debts. Edgar did not reflect that a day of reckoning must come at last.

At last Hamilton Schuyler thought it time to bring matters to a crisis.

"Do you know how much you are owing me, Edgar?" he said one evening.

"No," answered Edgar uneasily.

"Seventy-five dollars!"

"It can't be!" exclaimed Edgar, incredulous.

"These things increase faster than you think for," said Schuyler carelessly.

"I suppose you'll let it run," remarked Edgar with a troubled look.

"I should be glad to do so, my dear boy, but I need the money. I was hit rather hard at the races yesterday, and the long and short of it is, that you will have to pay me."

"I can't pay you," said Edgar doggedly.

Schuyler frowned.

"What do you mean by that?" he demanded sternly.

"I mean exactly what I say. I haven't got any money. I only get five dollars a week, and I can't spare any of that."

"You've got to get the money. You had no business to bet if you couldn't pay."

"I never did bet till I got acquainted with you."

"Enough of this, boy!" said Hamilton, waving his hand in a dignified manner. "I shall have to lay the matter before your father."

"No, don't do that! He wouldn't let me keep my wages."

"That is your affair, not mine. Can't you tell him you want to pay a tailor's bill, and get the money that way."

"No; I get my clothes charged at his tailor's."

"Oh, well, I don't care how you get it as long as you do get it. Doesn't your father leave any money lying about in his desk, or in his bureau drawers?"

"No. Besides, you don't want me to steal, do you?"

"Not if you can get the money any other way."

"Look here, Mr. Schuyler, I thought you were rich. How do you happen to be in want of seventy-five dollars?"

"Anybody might be short of money. One day when I was traveling in the Adirondacks, I met a rich man—a millionaire—who was in trouble. 'I say, Schuyler,' he said to me, 'can you loan me a hundred dollars. I give you my word I am almost penniless, and no one knows me here.' Now I happened to have three hundred dollars in my pocket-book, and I at once produced it and lent him the money. You see even a millionaire can get into a money scrape."

"Who was the millionaire?" asked Edgar, who

was not quite so credulous a believer of Schuyler's pictures as formerly.

"I don't feel at liberty to tell. It would not be honorable. But to come back to our own business! You must make some arrangement to pay me."

"Tell me how," said Edgar sulkily.

"Don't you deposit for your firm in the Park Bank?"

"Yes."

"Always checks?"

"Sometimes there are bank bills."

Schuyler bent over and whispered in Edgar's ear. Edgar flushed and then looked nervous and agitated.

"You ask me to do that," he said.

"Yes, there is no danger. Say you lost the bills in the street."

Edgar was not a conscientious boy or a boy of high principle, but this suggestion shocked him.

"Would you ruin me?" he asked.

"I would have you pay me what you owe me. If you don't there will be a fuss."

"I wish I had never met you, Mr. Schuyler," said poor Edgar bitterly.

"I have been disappointed in you," said Schuyler coldly. "I thought you were the son of a gentleman and a gentleman yourself."

"Who says I am not?"

"I don't. I expect you to behave like one. Good night."

This interview took place on Fifth Avenue not far from Delmonico's café. When the two parted another boy, who had been following at a little distance, moved rapidly forward and placed his hand on Edgar's shoulder.

"Cousin Edgar," he said.

Edgar turned.

"Mark!" he said, not with his old hauteur, for trouble had humbled his pride.

"Yes. Who was that you were walking with?" asked Mark.

"No one you know. He is Mr. Schuyler, from one of the best New York families."

Mark smiled.

"I hope you have no business with him," he said.

"I owe him seventy-five dollars, and I don't know how on earth I am going to pay him."

"What do you owe him that for?"

"For bets on games of billiards."

"This Hamilton Schuyler, as he calls himself, is an adventurer, a swindler, and a thief. His family is not as good as yours or mine."

"Is this true?" asked Edgar stupefied.

"Yes. Don't trouble yourself about what you owe him. Appoint a meeting for him to-morrow evening at the Fifth Avenue Hotel. I will go there and meet him with you. I'll get you out of your scrape."

"Do that, Mark, and I'll be your friend for life. I'll never treat you meanly again."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AT THE FIFTH AVENUE HOTEL.

On arriving in New York Mark took his young charge at once to the house of Mr. Gilbert.

It was at the close of the day, and Mr. Gilbert had returned from his office. He received Mark with great cordiality.

"True and faithful, as I expected!" he said. "How did you enjoy your trip?"

"Very much, sir. I hope, some day, to visit California again."

"So you are Philip Lillis, my boy," continued Mr. Gilbert kindly. "Do you think you shall like to live in New York?"

"Yes, sir."

"Were you sorry to leave California?"

"No, sir; Mr. Sprague and Oscar did not treat me well. I would rather live with you."

"Your father was a cousin and dear friend. I will try to make his boy comfortable and happy. Mark, will you stay to supper?"

"I should like to very much, but I have not yet seen my mother."

"That is sufficient excuse. Your first duty is to her. Wait a moment. I must express my acknowledgments to you in a substantial manner."

Mr. Gilbert sat down at his desk and wrote a check, which he inclosed in an envelope.

"Open it when you get home," he said.

"I have a balance of about forty dollars belonging to you, Mr. Gilbert, from my expense money."

"Keep it. I am sure it will be more useful to you than to me."

"How kind you are, Mr. Gilbert!"

"I hope to continue so. Take a few days for rest, and then come round to my counting-room and we will talk of your future prospects."

Mrs. Mason gave Mark a glad welcome.

"I am so glad to see you," she said.

"I hope you did not want for money while I was gone."

"No; I still have half the money you gave me from Mr. Gilbert when you went away. Shall I give it back to you?"

"No, mother; keep it for current expenses. Mr. Gilbert gave me a check just now, but I don't know how much it is."

He opened the envelope and took out the check.

"It is for two hundred dollars!" he exclaimed. "Mother, we are growing rich. With the balance in my hands, which Mr. Gilbert told me to keep, I have two hundred and forty dollars."

"We have much to be thankful for, Mark. Compare our present state with three months since. Shall you go back to the telegraph office?"

"No; Mr. Gilbert will probably give me a place in his counting-room, but I shall wait a few days first. Is there any news?"

"Your uncle has been to see me again. He offered me five hundred dollars if I would sign a release to him as executor."

"You didn't do it?"

"No."

"I am glad. Mother, Uncle Solon is trying to swindle us out of a large sum. I heard about the Golden Hope mine when I was away. The shares are booming, and I shall to-morrow call on my friend the lawyer and request him to communicate with Mr. Talbot."

"I leave the matter in your hands, Mark. Though you are so young, you seem to have a judgment beyond your years."

"Thank you for the compliment, mother. I am afraid Uncle Solon would not agree with you.

That reminds me. I have an engagement with Edgar to-morrow evening."

"Indeed! I thought you and Edgar were not friendly."

"He has got into a scrape, and I have promised to help him out."

"Is it anything serious?"

"He owes an adventurer seventy-five dollars, and the latter is trying to frighten him into paying it. I know the man to be a swindler, and shall be able to foil him in his plans."

"If you can be of service to Edgar I hope you will. He has not treated you well, but he is your cousin."

The next evening Edgar Talbot walked into the Fifth Avenue Hotel. He felt nervous, for he did not understand how Mark could help him. It seemed strange to him that he should be indebted to his poor and almost despised cousin for help in his time of trouble.

A minute after Mark entered looking cheerful and happy.

"Good evening, Edgar," he said. "Has our friend Schuyler appeared?"

"Not yet."

"I don't want him to see me at first. I will go into the reading room, and when you get ready in-

vite him in there. First, draw him out and see what he proposes to do."

Mark's confident manner somewhat allayed Edgar's alarm. He was proud and arrogant, but he had little courage.

He sat down on the sofa at the left hand side of the entrance and in about five minutes Hamilton Schuyler swaggered in. He was carefully dressed and had a rose in his buttonhole.

"I am going to the opera this evening with a fashionable party," he said, "and I shall have to hurry up my business with you."

"I am here on time," said Edgar.

"I see. Well, I suppose you have brought the money with you."

"You mean the seventy-five dollars?"

"Of course I do."

"No, Mr. Schuyler, I have not brought the money."

"And why not, I should like to know?" demanded Schuyler with a dark frown.

"Because I have no means of getting it."

"That isn't my lookout. It is yours. That money I must and will have."

Edgar had been told by Mark what to say, and he replied, "Then, I think, Mr. Schuyler, you will have to sue me."

"Nonsense! I shall adopt quite a different course."

"What is that?"

"I will lay the matter before your father."

Edgar winced, but he was prepared with a reply.

"I don't think it will do you any good. Father won't pay such a bill as that."

"At any rate it will get you into trouble with him."

"Yes it might," said Edgar nervously.

Schuyler saw his advantage. He must play upon the fears of his young dupe.

"Come, Edgar," he said, "suppose we talk over this matter sensibly. You are indebted to me in the sum of seventy-five dollars."

"I never got any value for it."

"It is the result of several fair and honest bets which you lost. As a boy of honor, you must pay me."

"I have told you that I don't know where to get the money."

"And I suggested a plan."

"You suggested that I should appropriate some of the money I was given by my employer to deposit in the Park Bank."

"Hush!" said Schuyler apprehensively. "Don't blurt out secrets."

"Well, you hinted at some such thing."

"I don't care how you get the money. If you know what is best for yourself, you'll get it somehow and somewhere."

"I thought you were wealthy, Mr. Schuyler. I did'nt think you would press me like this."

"I am wealthy, but as I told you I have met with some loses recently, or I would have given you more time on this debt."

"Suppose I can't pay you?"

"Then you will have to take the consequences."

"That means that you will go to my father?"

"Not alone that. I will let it be known everywhere that you have refused to pay a debt of honor and that will exclude you from the society of gentlemen."

Edgar was unprepared to go further, and he thought it time to obtain Mark's assistance.

"Let us go into the reading room," he said. "Perhaps we can settle the matter there."

"All right! I want to be easy with you, and I will agree to take off ten dollars if you will pay me the balance."

"I will see what I can do."

Edgar led the way into the reading room at the rear of the office. He saw Mark sitting on a chair at the opposite side of the room, and he led Schuyler up to it.

Schuyler was short-sighted, and did not make out Mark till Edgar said: "Mr. Schuyler, let me introduce you to my cousin, Mark Mason!"

"The telegraph boy!" ejaculated Schuyler, his face changing.

"I see you know me, Mr. Schuyler," said Mark. "My cousin tells me you want him to pay you seventy-five dollars."

"I don't know what you have to do with the matter," said Schuyler stiffly.

"Then I will tell you. You have imposed yourself upon Edgar as a respectable man of good social position while I know you to be an adventurer and a swindler."

"Do you mean to insult me?" demanded Schuyler looking around the room nervously.

"I mean to protect my cousin. Give him the memorandums you have, or tear them up and cease to persecute him, or I will call in a policeman."

Hamilton Schuyler looked furious, but he knew Mark and his resolute spirit, and felt afraid he would do as he threatened.

"You cub!" he hissed. "You are always interfering with me."

He turned upon his heel and left the reading room.

"He won't trouble you any more, Edgar," said Mark.

"How can I thank you, Mark?" said Edgar gratefully. "You have got me out of a bad scrape. That fellow has drained me of every cent. I had to borrow five dollars of a clerk in the office to satisfy him, and if I pay it I shall have nothing to spend for a week."

"Then let me be your banker, Edgar," said Mark as he drew a five-dollar note from his pocket and offered it to his cousin.

"Can you spare this, Mark?" asked Edgar in surprise and relief.

"Yes."

"I don't know when I can repay you."

"Take your own time. Pay a dollar a week if you like."

"Won't you call round at the house?" asked Edgar.

"Thank you, not this evening. I hope the time will come when we can meet each other often."

"Mark is a good fellow," thought Edgar as he walked up Fifth Avenue. "I thought he was poor, but he seems to be better off than I am."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

SOLON TALBOT'S PLANS.

SOLON TALBOT was much elated by the great rise in the stock of the Golden Hope Mine. At two hundred and fifty dollars each, the four hundred shares held by his father-in-law's estate would bring one hundred thousand dollars. While only half of this rightfully belonged to him, he felt that he was safe in appropriating the whole, as he imagined that Mark and his mother had no clew to its real ownership.

He had an offer from Crane & Lawton of a hundred thousand for the stock, and this he could obtain at any time. He had not thus far been able to obtain Mrs. Mason's signature to a release, but this he reflected was only a matter of form and need not be regarded.

Mr. Talbot lived in a flat, but desired to own a house. With the capital at his command when the mining stock was disposed of, he felt sure that he could realize a large income in Wall Street by dealings in

the stock market. Somehow he seemed to think that the great rise in Golden Hope stock reflected credit on his sagacity.

He went to the office of a prominent real estate broker and examined his list of houses for sale. One especially pleased him—a house on West Forty-Seventh street in excellent condition, which he could buy for forty-five thousand dollars.

"You can pay twenty thousand dollars down," said the broker, "and the balance can stand on mortgage at five per cent."

"I shall probably pay cash down for the whole," responded Mr. Talbot, with the air of a capitalist.

"Very well Mr. Talbot," said the broker respectfully, "that will of course be satisfactory. So would the other arrangement."

"I will decide in a day or two and let you know," added Talbot.

When he went home he could not help boasting a little of his proposed purchased.

"Mary," he said, "what should you say if I bought a house."

"In Brooklyn?

"No I must live here in New York. My business will be here."

"I thought New York property came high, Mr. Talbot."

"So it does but I propose to go high."

"I suppose you will have to pay as much as twenty thousand dollars for a desirable house."

"Twenty thousand dollars! what are you thinking of?"

"Why, our house in Syracuse was sold for ten thousand dollars, and I thought you might have to pay twice as much here."

"I should say so, Mrs. Talbot. I am in treaty for a house costing forty-five thousand dollars."

Mrs. Talbot was astonished.

"I had no idea you could afford to pay so much for a house, Solon," she said.

"My dear, I am afraid you underrate my business abilities. I haven't said anything to you about my business success, but I have been making money lately. Yes, I feel that I can afford to pay forty-five thousand dollars for a house."

"Where is the house situated?"

"In West Forty-Seventh Street, between Fifth and Sixth Avenues. That's a fine block—a good many fashionable people live there."

"I don't know whether I shall feel at home among them.

"I mean, Mrs. Talbot, that you shall take a high place in New York society. As *my* wife you will be entitled to such."

"I am not ambitious in that way. I should rather be able to see Ellen often than to receive fashionable people."

"Ahem, Mrs. T. You must remember that Ellen lives in a very poor way, and it would do you harm to have it known that she is your sister."

"You would not have me repudiate my own sister?" said Mrs. Talbot, half indignantly.

"Well, no, not exactly repudiate her, but you can receive her early in the morning when no one is likely to be here. You must remember also that Mark, her son, has been, and perhaps still is, a common telegraph boy, whom we couldn't have coming freely to the house and claiming relationship with Edgar.

"I think Mark is a pretty good fellow," said Edgar unexpectedly.

"It was only the previous evening that Mark had got him out of trouble.

"This is a little surprising in you, Edgar," said Solon Talbot, arching his brow." I thought you looked down upon him."

"I did, but I have changed my opinion of him."

"He is a poor working boy."

"He may be a working boy but he has more money than I. He always seems to have plenty of it."

"Probably somebody has paid him some money,

and he carries it all around with him. Have you seen him since he returned from his journey?"

"Yes, father."

"Has he gone back to the telegraph office?"

"No, he says he shan't go back."

"Has he any position?"

"No he is not working just now."

"He is a foolish boy. He will spend the little money he has, and then, when he wants to go back to the telegraph office, they won't receive him."

"I am glad you are on better terms with Mark, Edgar," said Mrs. Talbot regarding her son with unusual favor.

"Don't be influenced too much by what your mother says, Edgar," said his father, "social distinctions must be observed."

For once Edgar was not influenced by what his father said. He was not wholly bad, and Mark's friendly service in rescuing him from the clutches of Hamilton Schuyler had quite changed his feelings towards his cousin. Then the timely loan of five dollars had also its effect.

This was the day for the meeting of the two sisters at Arnold & Constable's. Mrs. Talbot informed her sister of her husband's plan.

"I think Mr. Talbot must be getting along very

well," she said. "He told me this morning that he is negotiating for a fine brown stone house on West Forty-Seventh Street. He is to pay forty-five thousand dollars for it."

"That is a large sum."

"Yes; I had no idea when we lived in Syracuse that Solon was so rich. He says that I underrated his business abilities."

"Do you know if he has met with any recent business success?"

"No; he never tells me particulars."

Mrs. Mason thought she could guess where the forty-five thousand dollars were coming from, and on her return she told Mark what she had heard.

"He must be going to sell the stock," said Mark.

"Can we stop him?"

"No, as executor he would have the right to do this, but we must arrange to share the proceeds. I will see our lawyer, and ask him what is best to be done."

At this moment there was a knock at the door. Mark opened it, and there stood Tom Trotter in his new uniform. I've got a message for you, Mark," he said.

"Who is it from?"

"From Mr. Rockwell."

"Let me see it."

The message was brief.

"Come round to my office, I want to see you.

"LUTHER ROCKWELL."

"How did you happen to bring this message, Tom?"

"I know Mr. Rockwell. I've often blacked his boots. I guess he's seen us together, for when he saw me this morning he asked if I could tell him your address which he had lost."

"I'll go right around there," said Mark.

"Perhaps he's going to take you into partnership, Mark."

"If he does, Tom, I'll find a good place in the office for you."

When Mark entered the banker's office he was at once introduced into Mr. Rockwell's presence.

"You sent for me, sir."

"Yes. I am thinking of purchasing a block of mining stock, and as you have recently been to the Pacific coast I thought you might have heard something about it."

"What's the name of the mine, sir?"

"The Golden Hope mine."

Mark's eyes lighted up.

"Yes, sir," he answered; "I can tell you a good deal about it. From whom do you expect to purchase?"

"From Crane & Lawton. It is a block of four hundred shares, at two hundred and sixty a share."

"Held by Solon Talbot."

"How do you know?"

"Because he is my uncle, and half of the shares belong to my mother.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE MINING STOCK IS SOLD.

"But I understood that you were poor," said Mr. Rockwell, surprised at Mark's statement.

"That we are so is because Mr. Talbot as executor has concealed from my mother the existence of the stock as a part of grandfather's estate.

"How long since you grandfather died?"

"Nearly two years."

"And the stock is only now to be sold?"

"Yes; my uncle had advices that it would be well to wait, as it was likely to go up."

"And your mother's share is half—say, two hundred shares?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then she will be comfortable for life. At the price I am thinking of paying, this will amount to over fifty thousand dollars. Now can you give me any information about the mine?"

"Yes, sir; I made it my business to inquire. It

is confidently expected to go considerably higher. It is growing richer every day."

"I shall rely upon your statements and buy the stock. After it is sold I advise you to take immediate steps to secure your share. Have you consulted a lawyer?"

"Yes; a young man."

"In a matter of this importance an older and more experienced lawyer will be better. I will give you a note to my own lawyer."

"Thank you, sir."

"I am now going to the office of Crane & Lawton where I shall meet your uncle, and conclude the business. Come here in less than two hours and I may be able to tell you the result."

"I will do so."

Solon Talbot was much elated when informed by Crane & Lawton that they had found a purchaser for his mining stock in the person of Luther Rockwell, the well-known banker.

"Do you think he would stand a higher price?" asked Talbot.

"It would not be wise to ask it."

"He is very rich. He could afford to pay more."

"True; but he became rich through prudence and shrewdness. Sell to him and you won't have to wait for your money."

"No doubt you are right. I will be guided by your advice."

When Solon Talbot was introduced to Mr. Rockwell he made a deferential bow.

"I am honored in making your acquaintance, Mr. Rockwell," he said.

"Thank you, sir."

The banker would have been more cordial but for what he had heard from Mark.

"How long have you owned this stock, Mr. Talbot?" inquired Mr. Rockwell.

"Three years."

"It is not held in your name."

"No; it belongs to the estate of my late father-in-law, Elisha Doane."

"I take it that you are the executor of the estate."

"Yes, sir."

Solon Talbot would not have been so communicative if he had supposed that the banker was a friend to Mark. He had forgotten Mark's agency in protecting Mr. Rockwell from the dynamite fiend.

"The stock was probably purchased at a very low figure."

"I presume so, though I do not know what was paid for it. Indeed I never heard of it until I came to examine the items of my father-in-law's estate. He didn't have much else."

"It is fortunate for his heirs."

"Yes," answered Talbot rather nervously.

He was afraid Mr. Rockwell might inquire who were the other heirs. Had he done so, he would have evaded the question or boldly declared that there was no other heirs except himself.

After half an hour's conversation the purchase was made, and a check for one hundred and four thousand dollars was handed to Mr. Talbot.

"I hope you will not have occasion to regret your purchase, Mr. Rockwell," said Solon.

"I think I shall not from advices I have received about increasing richness."

At the time appointed Mark called at Mr. Rockwell's office.

"Well, Mark," said the lawyer, "I made the purchase."

"At two hundred and sixty?"

"Yes. I congratulate you."

"That is, if I succeed in getting our share from my uncle."

"I will give you a letter to my lawyer, Mr. Gerrish. Obtain a letter from him, as your counsel, and call to-morrow upon your uncle with a formal demand for your mother's share of the proceeds of the mining stock."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

CONCLUSION.

Solon Talbot went home in high spirits. It was only recently that he had become aware of the great value of the Golden Hope shares. It had come to him as an agreeable surprise.

"With what I was worth before," he soliloquized, "I may now rate myself at one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. That is very good—for a beginning. I can afford to buy the house in Forty-Seventh Street, for I shall still have a hundred thousand dollars over, and in five years I mean to make it half a million."

He paced up and down his library in a state of joyous excitement. No thought of giving his sister-in-law her rightful due entered his mind.

"How can she find out?" he reflected. "Old Mr. Doane never told any of us of his mining shares. I presume he looked upon them as rather a risky investment. It has proved to be a splendid specula-

"'Mark!' exclaimed Talbot. What brings you here?"—Page 308.
Mark Mason's Victory.

tion, but it was rather a lucky accident than a shrewd purchase."

It was after breakfast on the morning succeeding the sale of stock. Mr. Talbot was preparing to go over to the house which he proposed to purchase for a last examination before making up his mind, when the servant entered the library.

"There is a boy down-stairs wishes to see you, Mr. Talbot," he said.

"Perhaps a boy from Crane & Lawton," he reflected. "Show him up."

Directly afterwards Mark Mason entered the room.

"Mark!" exclaimed Talbot. "What brings you here!"

"A matter of business, Uncle Solon."

"Then you will have to wait, for I am just going out."

"The business is important," said Mark significantly.

"Well, what is it?"

"I understand you sold yesterday the shares in the Golden Hope Mine belonging to grandfather's estate."

"What!" exclaimed Solon Talbot, his face showing his surprise and dismay.

"There were four hundred shares, and they were sold to Luther Rockwell, the banker."

"Who told you this? Have you had any communication from Crane & Lawton?"

"No; though I know the sale was made through them."

Solon Talbot paused long enough to pull himself together. It would never do to surrender at discretion. He would brazen it out to the last.

"Your information is partly true," he said. "I did sell some shares of mining stock, but they belonged to me. You have nothing to do with them."

"Uncle Solon," said Mark composedly, "it is useless to try to deceive me. The four hundred shares were bought by my grandfather, and belonged to his estate. Half of the proceeds rightfully belongs to my mother."

Spots of perspiration stood on Solon Talbot's brow. Should he allow fifty thousand dollars to slip from his grasp?

"You audacious boy!" he exclaimed. "How dare you make such an assertion?"

Because I happen to know that the four hundred shares stood in the name of my grandfather, Elisha Doane."

"That is a lie. May I ask where you got this information?"

"From the purchaser of the stock, Luther Rockwell."

"What do you know of Luther Rockwell?" demanded Solon Talbot, incredulous.

"He is one of my best friends. Before buying the shares of the Golden Hope mine he asked my advice."

"Do you expect me to believe such ridiculous stuff? What could you know about the mine?"

"I have recently returned from California. On the way I stopped in Nevada, and I have in my pocket a statement signed by the secretary of the company, that four hundred shares of the stock stood in the name of my grandfather."

It was a series of surprises. Solon Talbot walked up and down the library in a state of nervous agitation.

"What do you expect me to do?" he added finally.

"This letter will inform you, Uncle Solon."

From whom is it?"

"From my lawyer, George Gerrish."

Mr. Gerrish, as Mr. Talbot knew, was one of the leaders of the bar. He opened it with trembling hands, and read the following:

"MR. SOLON TALBOT:

"DEAR SIR:

"My client, Mark Mason, authorizes me to demand of you an accounting of the sums received by

you as executor of the estate of his late grandfather, Elisha Doane, to the end that his mother, co-heiress with your wife, may receive her proper shares of the estate. An early answer will oblige,

"Yours respectfully,

"GEORGE GERRISH."

"Do you know Mr. Gerrish well, too?" asked Talbot.

"No, sir, but Mr. Rockwell gave me a note to him. I have had an interview with him."

"Say to him that he will hear from me."

Mark bowed and withdrew. Within a week Solon Talbot had agreed to make over to his sister-in-law, Mrs. Mason, a sum of over fifty thousand dollars, representing her share of her father's estate. He reconsidered his purpose of buying the house in West Forty-Seventh Street, and decided to remain in the flat which he then occupied.

Mrs. Mason and Mark took a handsome flat up town, and henceforth were able to live as well as their pretentious relatives. Mark was advised by Mr. Rockwell as to the investment of his mother's money, and it has already increased considerably. He is himself taking a mercantile course at a commercial college, and will eventually enter the establishment of Mr. Gilbert, with whom he is as great a favorite as ever.

It never rains but it pours. One morning Mrs. Mack, the aged miser, was found dead in bed. She left a letter directing Mark to call on her lawyer. To his surprise he found that he was left sole heir to the old lady's property, amounting to about five thousand dollars.

"What shall I do with it, mother?" he asked. "I have no rightful claim to it. She only left it to me that her nephew might not get it."

"Keep it till he gets out of prison, and then help him judiciously if he deserves it. Meanwhile invest it and give the income to charity."

Mark was glad that he was able to follow this advice. Jack Minton is still in jail, and it is to be feared that his prison life will not reform him, but Mark means to give him a chance when he is released.

Through Mark's influence, his old friend, Tom Trotter, has been taken into a mercantile establishment where his natural sharpness is likely to help him to speedy promotion. Mark has agreed to pay his mother's rent for the next three years, and has given Tom a present of two hundred dollars besides. He is not one of those who in prosperity forget their humble friends.

And now after some years of privation and narrow means Mrs. Mason and Mark seem in a fair way

to see life on its sunny side. I hope my readers will agree that they merit their good fortune.

On the other hand, Mr. Talbot has lost a part of his money by injudicious speculation, and his once despised sister-in-law is now the richer of the two. Edgar has got rid of his snobbishness and through Mark's friendship is likely to grow up an estimable member of society.

THE END.

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Wrecked on Spider Island; or, How Ned Rogers Found the Treasure. By JAMES OTIS. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

A "down-east" plucky lad who ships as cabin boy, not from love of adventure, but because it is the only course remaining by which he can gain a livelihood. While in his bunk, seasick, Ned Rogers hears the captain and mate discussing their plans for the willful wreck of the brig in order to gain the insurance. Once it is known he is in possession of the secret the captain maroons him on Spider Island, explaining to the crew that the boy is afflicted with leprosy. While thus involuntarily playing the part of a Crusoe, Ned discovers a wreck submerged in the sand, and overhauling the timbers for the purpose of gathering material with which to build a hut finds a considerable amount of treasure. Raising the wreck; a voyage to Havana under sail; shipping there a crew and running for Savannah; the attempt of the crew to seize the little craft after learning of the treasure on board, and, as a matter of course, the successful ending of the journey, all serve to make as entertaining a story of sea-life as the most captious boy could desire.

Geoff and Jim: A Story of School Life. By ISMAY THORN. Illustrated by A. G. WALKER. 12mo, cloth, price 75 cents.

"This is a prettily told story of the life spent by two motherless bairns at a small preparatory school. Both Geoff and Jim are very lovable characters, only Jim is the more so; and the scrapes he gets into and the trials he endures will, no doubt, interest a large circle of young readers."—*Church Times.*

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The Castaways; or, On the Florida Reefs. By JAMES OTIS. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

This tale smacks of the salt sea. It is just the kind of story that the majority of boys yearn for. From the moment that the Sea Queen dispenses with the services of the tug in lower New York bay till the breeze leaves her becalmed off the coast of Florida, one can almost hear the whistle of the wind through her rigging, the creak of her straining cordage as she heels to the leeward, and feel her rise to the snow-capped waves which her sharp bow cuts into twin streaks of foam. Off Marquesas Keys she floats in a dead calm. Ben Clark, the hero of the story, and Jake, the cook, spy a turtle asleep upon the glassy surface of the water. They determine to capture him, and take a boat for that purpose, and just as they succeed in catching him a thick fog cuts them off from the vessel, and then their troubles be in. They take refuge on board a drifting hulk, a storm arises and they are cast ashore upon a low sandy key. Their adventures from this point cannot fail to charm the reader. As a writer for young people Mr. Otis is a prime favorite. His style is captivating, and never for a moment does he allow the interest to flag. In "The Castaways" he is at his best.

Tom Thatcher's Fortune. By HORATIO ALGER, JR. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

Like all of Mr. Alger's heroes, Tom Thatcher is a brave, ambitious, unselfish boy. He supports his mother and sister on meager wages earned as a shoe-pegger in John Simpson's factory. The story begins with Tom's discharge from the factory, because Mr. Simpson felt annoyed with the lad for interrogating him too closely about his missing father. A few days afterward Tom learns that which induces him to start overland for California with the view of probing the family mystery. He meets with many adventures. Ultimately he returns to his native village, bringing consternation to the soul of John Simpson, who only escapes the consequences of his villainy by making full restitution to the man whose friendship he had betrayed. The story is told in that entertaining way which has made Mr. Alger's name a household word in so many homes.

Birdie: A Tale of Child Life. By H. L. CHILDE-PEMBERTON. Illustrated by H. W. RAINEY. 12mo, cloth, price 75 cents.

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Lost in the Canon: Sam Willett's Adventures on the Great Colorado. By ALFRED R. CALHOUN. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

This story hinges on a fortune left to Sam Willett, the hero, and the fact that it will pass to a disreputable relative if the lad dies before he shall have reached his majority. The Vigilance Committee of Hurley's Gulch arrest Sam's father and an associate for the crime of murder. Their lives depend upon the production of the receipt given for money paid. This is in Sam's possession at the camp on the other side of the cañon. A messenger is dispatched to get it. He reaches the lad in the midst of a fearful storm which floods the cañon. His father's peril urges Sam to action. A raft is built on which the boy and his friends essay to cross the torrent. They fail to do so, and a desperate trip down the stream ensues. How the party finally escape from the horrors of their situation and Sam reaches Hurley's Gulch in the very nick of time, is described in a graphic style that stamps Mr. Calhoun as a master of his art.

Jack: A Topsy Turvy Story. By C. M. CRAWLEY-BOEVEY With upward of Thirty Illustrations by H. J. A. MILES. 12mo, cloth, price 75 cents.

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Search for the Silver City: A Tale of Adventure in Yucatan. By JAMES OTIS. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

Two American lads, Teddy Wright and Neal Emery, embark on the steam yacht Day Dream for a short summer cruise to the tropics. Homeward bound the yacht is destroyed by fire. All hands take to the boats, but during the night the boat is cast upon the coast of Yucatan. They come across a young American named Cummings, who entertains them with the story of the wonderful Silver City, of the Chan Santa Cruz Indians. Cummings proposes with the aid of a faithful Indian ally to brave the perils of the swamp and carry off a number of the golden images from the temples. Pursued with relentless vigor for days their situation is desperate. At last their escape is effected in an astonishing manner. Mr. Otis has built his story on an historical foundation. It is so full of exciting incidents that the reader is quite carried away with the novelty and realism of the narrative.

Frank Fowler, the Cash Boy. By HORATIO ALGER, JR. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

Thrown upon his own resources Frank Fowler, a poor boy, bravely determines to make a living for himself and his foster-sister Grace. Going to New York he obtains a situation as cash boy in a dry goods store. He renders a service to a wealthy old gentleman named Wharton, who takes a fancy to the lad. Frank, after losing his place as cash boy, is enticed by an enemy to a lonesome part of New Jersey and held a prisoner. This move recoils upon the plotter, for it leads to a clue that enables the lad to establish his real identity. Mr. Alger's stories are not only unusually interesting, but they convey a useful lesson of pluck and manly independence.

Budd Boyd's Triumph; or, the Boy Firm of Fox Island. By WILLIAM P. CHIPMAN. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

The scene of this story is laid on the upper part of Narragansett Bay, and the leading incidents have a strong salt-water flavor. Owing to the conviction of his father for forgery and theft, Budd Boyd is compelled to leave his home and strike out for himself. Chance brings Budd in contact with Judd Floyd. The two boys, being ambitious and clear sighted, form a partnership to catch and sell fish. The scheme is successfully launched, but the unexpected appearance on the scene of Thomas Bagsley, the man whom Budd believes guilty of the crimes attributed to his father, leads to several disagreeable complications that nearly caused the lad's ruin. His pluck and good sense, however, carry him through his troubles. In following the career of the boy firm of Boyd & Floyd, the youthful reader will find a useful lesson—that industry and perseverance are bound to lead to ultimate success.

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